By SWAAGYMAGGIE

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From Travelling With You

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Chapter-1 "Off We Go"

Chapter-1

“Off We Go”

We Humans Have The Tendency To Go For A Change of Pace By Travelling. But What If One Such Travel….Could Change The Entire Course Of Our Life?

“Just…One…More…Inch !” *Abhishek grunted, throwing his entire body weight onto the suitcase*.”Dawg, we are just going for a month, not for a lifetime. Chill out with your stuff,” *Siddhant says while sitting on Abhishek’s Chair and gobbling down chips like it's the last packet on Earth*.”Y’know, gotta prepare big. After all, it's going to be one heck of a trip.” - A *Bold Claim for someone who can't even pack his suitcase.*

A few days ago

“God Dangit! This heat will fry me off before my parents get their hands on me,” *Siddhant smashes his fist on the desk*.
"Not gonna lie, you sure have got it hard. Firstly, the PTM is just around the corner. And if that's not bad enough already, then nuggets like ya who fail their

exams will have to attend extra classes FOR THE ENTIRE SUMMER!”
Abhishek hands over an extra popsicle he got to Siddhant.”
What about you, GENIUS?”
“Not good, not bad, I’ll get by with passing marks, so I'm good. You should just worry about yourself,”
Abhishek counters smoothly and delivers a cunning smirk. ;)

The last day before the summer vacation always feels like a never-ending day. The clock never seems to go past that 12 P.M mark, the sun doesn’t seem like it has moved an inch, and every second in the classroom feels like it has been on a loop for hours now.
And to top it all off, there is holiday homework. Something that’s always saved for the last of the vacations, except for the ones in their final year, of course. The expression Abhishek and Siffhant gave to their homeroom teacher said it all.

Since both of them live in the same society, as soon as their bus dropped them off at the gate, they went straight to Abhishek’s apartment-where SOMEONE awaited them.

“ATLAS! Home Sweet Home” *Abhishek jumped onto his bed and stretched till all possible bones in his body made a crackling sound.*

“Can't call it ‘sweet home’ when your socks are lying around in the open”.*Siddhant, with one hand covering his nose and another picking up Abhishek’s socks, wasn't having a ‘pleasant time.’ ”*
“It’s about time to let ourselves loose and finally feel young again.Let us enjoy our FREEDOM!”
“Let’s see how long this ’ FREEDOM ’ will last, you old geezer”.
Siddhant’s words felt like he might’ve known how things would turn out.”

The Next Day

“Bruhh, it’s soooo boring. How can summer vacation be THIS MUCH BORING!?”

Abhishek, in excitement of vacation, finished all his games and watchlist he had, IN A SINGLE DAY. He looked like a pale ghost, searching for something new to freshen him up.
“For once I agree with you,’ Mr ‘FREEDOM’.There really isn't anything fun to do nowadays.”

Both of them had completely given up hope. They had been lying on the bed since morning now. At first glance, they appeared nothing more than husk and hollow bodies.
Is there nothing that can save these two from decaying?

“Kids, come and have your lunch.” - *Somehow,6 words managed to prevent these two from turning into actual zombies. (For now, at least) However,r before these 2 could be ‘revived’, an unexpected guest appeared.*

It was Siddhant’s dad accompanying Abhishek’s father. Both of their fathers work for the same company and are good friends (another reason for the close friendship between Abhishek and Siddhant).

“Dad?” *Siddhant asked his father as they headed towards the dining table.”*
Today, we somehow managed to finish our pending work on time. So, we decided to have a family lunch together.” *Abhishek’s father was in good spirits. After lunch, both of them ‘lost their souls’ again. Abhishek’s mother told them to go play outside, but they retaliated, saying it’s too hot for them to even set a foot out.*

The summer heat cannot be controlled, but maybe our guest has something that can bring these two back to life.

“How about we all go for a family trip together?” *Siddhanth's father proposed a suggestion no one could refuse. (not like anyone was gonna say no to a trip to begin with)*

“Tokyo, let’s go to Tokyo!” *Abhishek excitedly yelled*.
“No, Switzerland is better, the atmosphere there is too good to be ignored”.*Siddhant held his stand*.
“Tokyo is better, this time is perfect for seeing Mount Fuji, and the manga’s are on heavy discount right now, IT’S THE BEST TIME TO GO THERE!”
“IDIOT, you do not understand the vibe Switzerland is giving off right now. Sunlight warming you up as you go out for a walk, with a cold breeze hitting you straight on your face, IT'S THE BEST!”

“TOKYO!”
”SWITZERLAND!”
“TOKYO!!”
”SWITZERLAND!!
“TOKYO!!!”
”SWITZERLAND!!!”

The noise grew so loud that it could be heard from another flat.

“Nashik.”

No scream, No physical action, nothing.
Just one word from Abhishek’s father was enough to shut both of them down.

Ronnie (Siddhanth’s Father) & I have already decided that we are going to Nashik after 2 days,” *explained Abhishek’s Father, completely crushing their hopes.*

Both boys looked gloomy, as if someone had just stolen something valuable from them.

“Don't worry, Nashik won’t be our final stop. We will be travelling all over Maharashtra, and maybe even to some other states if we get enough time during summer vacation. Nashik is just the start!”

Ronnie’s words brought such a glow to their faces as if someone had given them a million-dollar cheque. Both of them rushed into Abhishek’s room with their faces shining as bright as a newborn baby.

“Lemme search some spots up”.
“Start from Nashik, then go for Shirdi or Pune. These are most likely the places that will be next up on the list since they are close to Nashik.”

Ping

“A notification? Who is it?”
”It’s Misha”. *Siddhant’s voice came from a corner of the room as he looked for ANY snack possibly present there.*
(he couldn't find even a single piece of food in that room)
Excitedly said Abhishek, “Let’s invite her over, maybe she will come on the trip with us as well.”

Siddhant instantly replied," I don't think her parents will allow her for the trip".
"We can't say for sure until we try, lemme just call her up.

A few minutes later

"Yo,Shortput!
Still as short as ever huh?" *Abhishek laughs as he goes in for a high five.*
"No one can grow in a day you dumbo, we just met yesterday." *Misha lands a punch in his gut as she answers. Abhishek painfully screamed.*
"Owwwchhh!! , at least hold back a little, you Ape!" *Misha clenches her fist.* "Want another one?"
"Chill out, you two, no need to go wild, especially when it's this hot outside."
Luckily, Siddhant managed to stop them both before things got worse (for Abhishek, of course).

"So what did you two want to talk about?" *Misha inquired*
"Welp, both of our families are going on a trip TOGETHER. The plan is to cover as much of Maharashtra and maybe some other states as well. So…will you come with us?"*Abhishek asks Misha, hoping she will agree.*
"Im up, but I need to convince my father"
"Yea so it's a straight no, of course," *said Siddhanth in full confidence.*

Misha punched him hard in the back as he screamed in pain.

“Don't mind him, just try your best to convince your parents to join us for the trip. I can also come with you if you can't convince them yourself.” *With full faith, Abhishek had in his ability to convince anyone, he thought her father would be a piece of cake.*

“No need for all that, I'll try it myself.” *Both Abhishek and Siddhan hoped for the best as Misha left for her apartment (which is just 5 min away from Abhishek’s apartment).*

All three live in the same society but in different apartments, though their flat numbers are the same. One can even call their friendship ‘Destiny’.

A few minutes later

Misha was waiting for her father to come home so they could have dinner together (they always do) and also try to convince him for the trip.

“I'm back.” *The door opened, and a man wearing a classic blue shirt and holding a suitcase appeared. It was Kartik [Misha’s dad]*
“Welcome home Papa,” *Misha rushed off to hug him.*
“How’s my little princess doing?”
“I’m not little anymore”

“Right, right. Let me freshen up, then we will have dinner together.”
Somehow, this little Father-Daughter interaction managed to relieve some stress from Kartik’s face.

After dinner

“Papa, there’s something I wanna talk about.” *Misha came closer and sat right beside his father*
“Sure beta, what is it?” *Her father turned down the volume of the TV to listen to his princess's query*
“Both Abhishek and Siddhanth’s families are going on a trip all over Maharashtra, and some other states, altogether. Can we go along with them?” *Misha’s eyes shone bright with hope.*
“No, I have some important work this week, so we can't go.” *Though it seemed like her father had some other plans.*
Even though Misha was feeling down from her father’s statement, she didn't give up hope and tried again.
“Papa, it will be fun, all three families getting to go on a trip together is such a rare occasion, we shouldn't let it go to waste.”
“No means no, Misha. Instead, you should start doing your holiday homework from tomorrow to be able to finish it on time. You don’t want any backlog this year, right?” *Misha nodded, and Kartik headed towards his room & fell asleep after a long day. Misha silently went to her room.*

Without anyone learning about it, she cried her heart out all night till she fell asleep.

Then came the day of the trip

Back to the present

“Ready to go, slowpoke?”
“Of course, low altitude”

After loading up all the luggage in their cars, they were about to sit in when Misha and her family arrived.
Siddhant turned towards her and just asked her one question, “Are you going to come with us?”
Misha, with a smile on her face, said: “Not this time, maybe some other day for sure.”
Abhishek and Siddhant took a moment, bid their farewell, and quietly sat in their cars.

As the cars began to move, Misha and her family waved them off with a goodbye, but neither Abhishek nor Siddhant were in the mood to look back. They just couldn’t muster up the courage to look at Misha, more precisely, her damaged heart, and that face of hers which carries a fake smile at Present and tears from the Past. Only Misha wasn’t going, but the pain was mutual for all three of them. This just showed how deep their friendship has grown over the course of more than a decade.

After both cars left, Misha's father noticed her daughter shed a tear.

One.Single.Tear.

It was nothing compared to all the tears she had shed yesternight. Even so, that single tear just seemed to have carried the weight of all her emotions and all her pain.

A Father Can Be Strict, But Not Cruel Enough To Ignore Her Daughter's Tears.

When Misha came back to her room, she heard a knock on the door. It was her father.
He silently sat beside her, and with his hand on her head, asked," Misha, do you want to go on the trip with them?"
She replied," Yes."
That one single word was enough to change her fate.

Her father made an announcement," We are going to Nashik tomorrow, so pack your luggage today."

Misha's happiness knew no bounds; she jumped onto her father and hugged him as tightly as she possibly could.

The Next Day

Misha was on cloud nine. Soo happy that she forgot half her luggage and couldn't sleep last night. She hurried and grabbed it all back.
After loading up her luggage, she looked at the sky and made a declaration,"
Abhishek, Siddhant, I'm coming to get you two, so wait for me, IDIOTS!"
"Misha, hurry up, or we will leave you behind."
Kartik was sitting patiently waiting for his 'princess'
"On my way, papa." *Misha ran towards her car, happier than ever.*
It was hard to believe that this same girl had cried soo hard just the night before yesterday.

Only time will tell how this 'Family Trip' will go.

We Humans Are Bound By The Thread Of Fate, A Thread Which We Cannot Break Free From. However, It Doesn't Mean That We Cannot Bend It In Our Favour.

[Btw, all props to Vatsila Pargal for naming the main cast. W work twin ♧}

Chapter-2 “It’s Nashik not Nasik”

Chapter-2

“It’s Nashik not Nasik”

We Humans Often Do Things In a Complex Way, Thinking It’s ‘The Right Way’.But Maybe, Sometimes a Simple Way IS ‘The Right Way.’

“And why are we going to Pune now?” *Siddhant inquires as he tries to beat his old record in solving Rubik’s Cube for the 7th time now (even a middle schooler can beat his ‘record time’ in 1st try).*
”Because Abhishek’s sister is currently at his Granny’s place, and that’s in Pune.*” Siddhanth’s father seems to be enjoying this long road trip after months of office work.*

*“*Mummy! Papa*!” Avantika (Abhishek’s sister) runs towards her parents and jumps into her father’s arms.*”
Kids these days don’t even have basic etiquette on how to treat elders with respect.” *Abhishek never misses a chance to tease his little sister.*
"At least a 10-year-old like me doesn't need anyone to accompany her to the toilet at 3 A.M, unlike **A CERTAIN SOMEONE.”**

There's no doubt that both siblings share the same blood.
*"*Now now, let's stop fighting and have some tea, shall we*?" Abhishek's Grandpa suggests.*
*"*Just tea won't be enough. At least some sweets should be there to accompany them, correct uncle*?" Siddhant, who had breakfast like 10 minutes ago, is still down for a 'snack break'.*
*"*Of course, of course.*" Abhishek's grandpa brought some sweets from his room for everyone.*

After some time, they all went shopping in Phoenix Mall and then to a local restaurant for lunch. Abhishek's and Siddhant's families left for Nashik by evening and reached their destination by 9 P.M.

"All of you better sleep by 10:30 P.M because we have to go to Ram Kund at 5:30 in the morning to bathe." *Siddhant's father instructed all three of them.*
*"*But why soo early, uncle*?" Abhishek's sister has a bad record with waking up early."*
"So that we can enjoy the morning bath and visit many places on our first day. Now, go to your rooms and sleep*." Abhishek's father took Avantika to his room.*
*"*Ay Ay, Captain*!" Both boys were high on energy and low on sleep. (High-spirited idiots for sure).*

The Next Day

In the old city of Nashik, there exists N number of kunds. However, among them all, one remains unbeatable. The Ram kund...from where two hooligans emerge.

*"*See, I told ya that I can hold my breath longer."
"That's cuz you must've been a fish in your past life."
New Location, New environment, yet these two are up to their shenanigans.
"How about you two put a pause on your wildlife activities for once and just appreciate where you stand at the very moment?" *Abhishek's father can't take it easy even on a trip, thanks to these two.*
"So, what's so special about this kund again?"
Siddhant, being dumb as always, forgot why this kund is such a big deal.
*"*Shri Ram and Mata Sita used to bathe here during their exile. Which makes this kund a holy place even among other kunds,anddddd a great way to start our journey in Nashik." *Looks like Abhishek might not be as bad in general knowledge as he is in academics.*
*"*Mmm, now I feel fresh. Where are we heading off next, GP?*" Siddhant began to leave the kund as he was done with the bath.*
"Kalaram Temple it is."

As they left the temple, Avantika curiously asked.

"Papa, Why's this temple called 'Kalaram Temple'*?"*
"This tem-

*"*Because the idol of Shri Ram in this temple is black*," Abhishek answered swiftly before his father could even say a word.*
*"*So, was this idol exported from somewhere else? Because it's quite rare to find such an idol even in India*." Siddhant, for the first time in Nashik, asked a valid question.*
*"*Nope, and a fun fact-
This idol was found in the same Ram kund where we took a bath in the early morning. And these 14 stairs you see here, they represent the 14-year exile of Shri Ram*." Abhishek sure doesn't wanna leave any chance to flex his knowledge.*
"Dayum dude, you are on a roll for sure. Now, tell me the most important thing."
"Sure, what is it?"
"Where are we going for breakfast?"
Abhishek sighs (& the author as well).
*"*Should've expected that one. Next stop is where one of the best Misals is served in Maharashtra."
Abhishek knows how to get Siddhant excited.

"Welcome to Shri Ambika Restaurant, where the best Nashik Misal Pav is made every day."
"I'll be the judge of that. Exactly what makes this misal pav 'the best'?" *Siddhant asks as he sits at the table waiting for his order*.
"First of all, this place is over 50 years old and still has the same tasting misal pav as they used to make back in the day. The masala is homemade, there are

black spices in the curry, and thick & thin Sev along with fried peanuts in the sauce is what makes this misal pav 'the best'.The Pav is also fresh."
By the time Abhishek had finished his 'glazing', Siddhant was already done with his meal and was waiting for his 2nd order.

As Abhishek and Siddhant were enjoying their food, SOMEONE finally decided to wake up.SOMEONE who was supposed to wake up 'Early in the Morning'.

*Yawn "*Man, that was such a good dream. I should sleep some more.
What time is it anyway?"
Misha still has no clue that almost half the day is over.
*Looks at the clock "*HUUHH!!??? WDYM IT'S 11:30??? HOW AM I SOO LATE?? WHY DIDN'T ANYONE WAKE ME UP??? PAPA!, MUMMA! WAKE UP!!"

Yesterday, she and her family made it to Nashik way ahead of their schedule. So they decided to rest for the day and explore tomorrow. They spent their whole evening planning their next two days out, and after that, ate more than they should've. All that 'extra food' and 'planning instead of resting' led to THIS.

“Papa, what’s this bazaar called again?” *Misha is still half asleep and has no clue where she’s at rn.*
“This is Saraf Bazaar, famous for its old aesthetics; old wooden houses, broken stairs, etc, which gives off the feeling of being in a different era. It’s also famous for its superior gold quality, which makes it a hot spot for jewelry shopping.”
Kartik tries hard to avoid eye contact with his wife to avoid going bankrupt right on day 1 of his trip.
*”*Let’s go and buy some souvenirs for Abhishek, Siddhant, and their families.*”*
“Brilliant Idea!” Misha’s suggestion gave an opening to Kartik to avoid his wife (for some time at least).
*“*Even though Abhishek isn’t into accessories, I guess this bracelet will look good on him.” “Hmm, Ronnie does seem like the type of guy who will appreciate some good ol’ paintings.” *Neither father nor daughter has any idea what they should buy as a souvenir.*

*“*Misha, you want a drink? I know just the spot.”
“Yes, please.Any more delay and I might melt from this summer’s heat.”
Kartik took his family to a place where he often used to come before his marriage. (Ah, the good old days of his freedom).
”A Juice Corner*?” Misha didn’t look satisfied at all, as if it wasn’t up to her expectations”.*
“Don’t worry, once you try the pineapple sharbat here, you won't forget it for the rest of your life.*”*

*"*What even is so special about this sharbat?"
"See, there's the pineapple pulp for extra flavour, it's also milk-based with HOMEMADE ice cream and crushed ice on top. It's healthy, tasty, and definitely worth your buck.*" It's hard to tell whether it's actually THIS good or Kartik's just glazing it cuz of nostalgia.*
Well, at least it tastes great. Misha's reaction says that for sure.

"Now for some sweets.How about 'Budha Halwai'? I read online that his jalebi is top-notch." "All right, let's go then.*"*
One can't tell whether they are in Nashik to 'tour' or to 'taste'.Welp, everyone has their own way of doing things.
*"*Mmm, Khurchan vadi with the combo of hot Jalebi and Cold Basundi on a fine evening.Couldn't have asked for anything better!
Idk if they are actually enjoying it or just teasing me atp.
"Hey Swaagy"
Ye?
"You want some?"
… Yk, I can't eat that, right?
"Hehe, that's exactly why I'm asking you"
YOU DIMWIT! I'LL DELETE ALL UR FOOD! DON'T HIT YOUR AUTHOR IN HIS WEAK POINTS!

SWITCHING OVER TO THOSE TWO HALF-BAKED MONKEYS!

Achoo

"You two good? You both just sneezed at the same time." *Avantika finds it hard to believe just how strong the bond these two have, to be sneezing at the same time.*

"I felt like someone just mentioned us".

"Yea, and not in a good way." *At least these two haven't caught a cold, so it's all good.*

"All right, boys, here we are, now jump out of the car " *Both Abhishek's and Siddhant's mothers have left for some shopping, so now it's only their fathers who are stuck babysitting.*

"A wine yard? Yk, I do drink coffee a lot, but that doesn't mean I'll drink wine. Especially when I'm a minor." *It's a bit hard to tell whether he's actually saying No or just being sarcastic.*

" Chill out, you drunkard. There's a cafe nearby, so we can relax there. Let's just enjoy the ambience here for now"

Abhishek gives some fruit juice he has left to Avantika since she doesn't drink coffee.

"Mr.Guidebook, Care to share any insight you got?" *Without a doubt, Avantika was stunned by the vineyard's ambience.*

"Becau-"

"Hold up, lemme cook. One of the reasons why Nashik is famous is because of its wine production.

Nearly 80% of India's wine is produced in Nashik, which is why it's also known as 'Napa Valley of India'*."*
Right now, what's more impressive than the wine production of Nashik,is the fact that Siddhant knows THIS much.
*"*Why do YOU, of all people, know so much about wine production?*"*
"Well, as an active citizen of this country, it's my responsibility to be well informed about its statistics.*"*
Abhishek glared at Siddhant," Drunkard."
"No, that's called being well informed.*"*
*"*Drunkard."
"No."
"Drunkard."
"No!"
"Drunkard."
"No!!"
This argument went on for almost an hour.

Meanwhile, Misha and her family had reached their last destination for the day.

"It feels soo good. These calm waters, diminishing yet warm sunlight, and cool sea breeze.Coming to Gangapur Backwaters was worth it, right Papa?"
"Yeah, absolutely. You couldn't have picked a better spot than this. This is the best place for sunset in Nashik for sure.*"*

The Father-daughter duo was enjoying the sunset while sitting on a bench, eating ice cream. “Wish they allowed boat riding even during summer. Boating here, during the sunset, would’ve been one heck of an experience for sure.”
“It’s all right, maybe we can try it some other time. Let’s just enjoy our time here for now and then leave for the hotel. We’ve got big plans for tomorrow.”

As the sun submerged into the waters and the moon rose from afar, all three of them went back to their hotels and fell asleep to wake up early (especially a CERTAIN someone) and enjoy their final day in Nashik.

Day 2

Today, the Sun might’ve chosen a different direction to rise from. Why? Because Misha has managed to wake up wayyy before anyone else and is currently getting ready ahead of time. Let’s see what has gotten into her to be able to get up THIS early (It’s 5 in the morning right now).

“Got my phone, my powerbank, and most importantly, my hat. I’m now all set for today. Gotta hurry up, can’t leave papa waiting outside for too long.” *The sole reason why Misha was soo excited to travel today was because of where they were heading next.*

“Mmm, eating such a delicious breakfast while surrounded by grape vines is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The environment, the atmosphere, and even the vibe this place gives off are soo great! Grape Embassy truly is a great breakfast place, especially in the early morning."

The reason why Misha is soo head over heels for this place is not only because of the food this place offers, but also because this place is surrounded by well-maintained grape vines. *“*Misha, try some Adu vadi as well”

“For sure Papa, after I'm done with my Kothimbir vadi.”

At this rate, it won’t be long before she becomes nothing less than a Modak.”

All right, Misha, let’s go. We should leave for Gondeshwar Mahadev Temple now, before it gets crowded. There’s something I want to show you there.”

Though Misha nodded yes, her father knew better than anyone else that she wasn’t done eating yet.

“For some historical context, this temple was built back in the 12th century, making it one of the oldest temples all over the world, built thousands of years ago!”

Before his wife, Kartik’s first love has always been the rich culture of India. (Especially historical structures).

However,him being mesmerized by the architecture of this temple made him forget about one VERY important 'thing'.
"Huh?
Misha?
Misha, MISHA!"
It looks like Kartik isn't the only one 'lost' in the temple.
"Right behind you, Papa, I just went out to click some pictures."
Or maybe he really IS the only one 'lost'.
"Papa, was all of this really handmade?"
For someone going to Gondeshwar Mahadev, it's quite obvious that he/she WILL be amazed by its miraculous architecture.
"Yeah, all of these intricate carvings you see here are all man-made. Back in the golden days of Bharat, builders were far more skilled and creative than they are now. Even with the help of machines, we can't match their level of building skills."

We often say that foreign builds are impressive. Yes, no doubt about it, but that doesn't mean OUR builds are in any way inferior to them. Maybe next time, before comparing Indian architecture with foreign builds, try 'travelling'.

As they were about to head out for some shopping, Kartik got an unexpected call from one of his school-time friends. A call he DEFINITELY couldn't refuse.

“So Papa, are you sure that we are at the correct location?”
“He did say that we just have to come and wait outside his office for a while before he-
Ah, there he is”
Meeting his old friend after soo many years has got to be one of the best surprises he could’ve asked for.
”You sure have gotten old, baldie.”
“Better than going senile like you, latecomer.”
“C’mon, I was busy with work. I just got lucky enough to be able to finish it all up before time. Spare me a lecture now, will you?”
“Misha, this ‘poor fashion sense’ guy is your uncle, and unfortunately, an old friend of mine.” “HEY, THAT’S NO WAY TO INTRODUCE YOUR BEST FRIEND! SPECIALLY TO YOUR DAUGHTER! AND WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY ‘POOR FASHION SENSE GUY’!?”
“Back in the day, you always used to wear the wrong uniform on the wrong day.
And worst of all, who even uses his sister’s leggings for their socks?”
“Y’know what they say-”
“ Nope”
“JUST LISTEN!
Ahem,’ Tough times call for tough decisions, and difficult times are what make a boy a man.’”
“Or a woman, in your case”
“Whatever”

Even after all these years, both of them still haven't lost their spark.
"Namaste uncle"
"Hello beta. How are you?"
"Fine uncle, what about you?"
"Good. It's hard to believe that THIS GUY has such a well-mannered daughter.
Points at her father
Beta, DO NOT become like this man, all right?"
Instead of replying, Misha looked at his father.
"Wish YOU could turn out like your father. How's he anyway?"
"Out on a trip right now, probably gone for a few weeks with his friends. Mom has gone with him as well.
ANYWAYS, how about we all go to that park over there, it can be a nice picnic spot."
"Sounds good."

Misha's mother wasn't feeling well, so she went back to the hotel. As for these 3, they went over to a clean area in that park, opened a big picnic mat, and started their chit-chat. It started with Misha asking both of them to tell about their school days. She wanted to learn about her father's childhood as much as possible.
Their 'storytime session' went on for quite a while before their food arrived.

"Ah, there he is. I'll be right back."

While Kartik and Misha were still talking about Kartik's childhood, his friend went over to grab their food."

"Still ordering from **Dabbawala** huh?"
"Yep, nothing beats home-cooked food."
"When did you even order this?"
"Before I came to meet with you two, from their site."
"Their website? When did Dabbawala's make their own site?"
Ordering food from Dabbawala is one thing. Even Misha is used to it. But ordering from their site is something not many know about
"Yeah, after lockdown, Dabbawala's business went down by nearly 95% (mostly thanks to Zomato and Swiggy). So to prevent themselves from shutting down completely, they launched their own website in 2023 - DigitalDabbawala.com."

Note: Digitaldabbawala currently only operates in Mumbai and Thane. So they might not deliver in any other city. Dabbawalas are mentioned here for educational purposes only.

While Misha was having fun with her Father and Uncle in the North of Nashik, two EXTRA curious spirits were out there exploring in the South.

"See, this skeleton looks just like your brother's head"

“Yeah, both are empty cuz both don’t have a brain.”
Instead of looking at the beauty of these shiny stones and excavated fossils, Avantika and Siddhant are just looking for any chance possible to make fun of Abhishek.

A few hours back

“Uh, weren’t we supposed to wake up early?”
“Yeah, that was the plan.”
“Then how did we end up waking up at 10?”
“Because A CERTAIN SOMEONE’s sister wanted to play Uno, MIDNIGHT?” Si*ddhant and Abhishek are so annoyed because Avantika wanted to play UNO right at 12 A.M., and of course, these ‘power banks’ weren't gonna say no to her.*
What makes things even worse is that they’ve been stuck in traffic for over an hour now.
*”*To top it all off, she’s sleeping with mumma in the other car.”
“And I’m stuck with you two*.”*
Abhishek’s father is driving ahead with both the boys, while Ronnie is driving behind him with the rest of the family.

Back to Present

“Is this the moon rock?”
“Nope”
“What about this?”

“Nope”
“And this?”
“That’s a Mars rock; the moon rock is over there behind that statue.”
“Wow, this looks so cool”
“Why does this have so many holes?”
“Because it’s a moon rock.”
Avantika loves collecting unique stones for her stone collection. Which is why she loves different types of stones, especially when it’s from the Moon. The same thing can be said for Siddhant. He’s more of an ‘aesthetic’ person, which explains why he knows so much about rocks here (He just read about them all last night to flex on Abhishek). The only one who isn’t into this stuff much is Abhishek. Yet, he’s here because-

Before entering the Museum

“Listen, we need to buy something for Misha. Something she will like.”
"You got something in your mind?”
“A shiny crystal-”
“Outta budget”
“How about a shiny rock?”
“Idk I'm not into this stuff, but if you say so then alright I guess.”
Both of them were supposed to buy a gift for Misha, but now, they can’t stop looking at all these ‘creations of Mother Earth.’

“Here, at Gargoti Museum, there are minerals, shiny stones, fossils as old as 450 MILLION years, dinosaur’s skeleton-”
“Just like his Head”
“Huh?Wdym?”
“Nothing.”
“Whatever, you may continue”
“Right, and the best part is that even Moon and Mars rock is present here.”
“So Mr. ‘Googled everything last night’, where are we right now?”
“There are two sections,’ Deccan Plateau’ and ‘International Stone’.Right now we are at the 2nd one.”
“And where are we gonna buy souvenirs?”
“That shop is outside the museum.”
“Then let’s go and grab some before it gets too dark.”

P.s: When lava melts and turns into minerals, it’s called ‘Gargoti’ in Marathi.

All of them spent so much time buying souvenirs that they lost track of time. Now, Siddhant & Abhishek, and Misha are heading towards their final destination for the Nashik Trip.

However, there's just one more place the boys wanna visit. Though right now might not be a good time for that.

"Dude, why is it so dark now?"
"Because YOU spent more than an hour just buying stones."
"It's for Misha, and idk what her taste in this stuff is, so I had to take my time"
"Yea right, then stop being so scared right now."
"Easy for you to say since your car is coming behind ours, so if anything happens, we will be the first ones to get hit."
"It wasn't my idea to visit a haunted bridge, especially when it's so dark. We could've just gone from the highway. BUT NO, SOMEONE WANTED TO EXPERIENCE SOME 'THRILL' IN NASHIK. NOW BEAR IT!"
"Man, it's not like I knew that it would get so dark so soon. You can't just blame it on me, even Avantika wanted to come here, right?"
"Yea and now she's the one clinging to mummy."

Both Abhishek and Siddhant are in their cars and are talking via Call. Siddhant, the one who was most excited about coming here, is now just as scared and regretting his every decision.

"Y'know, there's a legend which says that, on the old Nasardi Bridge (the one we are at right now), there

lives a half-human, half-bull entity. Many people say that they have seen mysterious shadow figures, and some have even felt heavy pressure on their cars during late-night travels. W-w-what if something like that happens to u-u-us?”

As Siddhant, in his scared and wobbly voice, was narrating this legend, the phone was on speaker . Everyone listened to it very carefully. As they were crossing the bridge, SOMETHING happened.

“Huh?
Why isn’t the car moving, Papa?”
“Maybe something got stuck in the engine, lemme see.”
“M-m-ust be the doing of that bull!”
“Stop crying. You are scaring us as well.
The car will start working, just let uncle handle it.”

After a few attempts, the car finally started. The sound of the engine worked like an additional heartbeat for everyone. Still, there was a scent of horror in the atmosphere right now. Everyone was a bit tense, especially Siddhant.

“Abhishek, I’m not feeling good about this. What if our car stopped cuz of that bull?”
“As I said, stop being scared AND STOP SCARING US! AVANTIKA IS SO SCARED SHE WON’T EVEN

OPEN HER EYES! And it’s not like we’ve seen any shadow figure or felt heavy press-”

Again, Siddhant’s car stopped. This time, because of a punctured tire.

“IT’S THE BULL’S DOING FOR SURE!! AHHH WE ALL ARE GOING TO DIE TONIGHT AAAAAA!!!”
“SHUT UPPP!!”
“Don’t worry, I'll go and help Kartik replace the tire. We are almost at the end of this bridge anyway.”

After a bit of struggle, both of them managed to repair the tire.

“All of you just pray that nothing bad happens now.”

While everyone was busy praying, Siddhant peeked outside his window. To his nightmare, he saw a black figure lurking near a water channel.

“MUMMMYYY!! IT'S THAT BULLLL! RUNNNN!!!”

Siddhant screamed so loud that even the black figure, which was just a black cat minding her own business, ran away. His father, already scared, ran his car over at full speed, without any second thought of running someone over, all for the sake of his life. It all happened so fast that Abhishek and his family couldn’t understand a thing. All they knew was that

something scared Siddhant so bad he screamed from the rooftop of his lungs.

“The heck happened??! Why did you scream???”
“A-a-abhishek, when I took a peek outside my window, I-i-i-i saw a black figure behind your ca-”

Before Siddhant could finish what he was saying, Abhishek’s father ran his car at its maximum speed. He knew that dying in a car accident would be way better than being killed by a ghost.

Meanwhile, Misha, who had gone to a local theater with her father and uncle to watch Lavani dance, was also going to her final destination of the day. She really enjoyed the traditional dance performance.

Now, some might call it luck, others may call it destiny, but all three of these families were going to the same spot, Goda Ghat, for the famous Goda Aarti. Maybe it’s the ***thread of fate*** *that keeps connecting the three of them, no matter how far away they are from each other.*

Thanks to that ‘horror incident’, Abhishek and Siddhant managed to make it to the Ghat, a few minutes before Goda Aarti started (Both of them were so scared that they were shivering). Misha also made it in the nick of time. Even though ‘both’ were

in the same place, the difference in timing caused them to be separated by the crowd.

A peaceful evening, surrounded by devotees, witnessing Goda Aarti altogether, as the sun nearly sets. One can't really hope for a better way to end their trip in Nashik than this. This Aarti also managed to calm everyone down, truly just what they needed to forget about that bull.

As the Aarti came close to its end, everyone started leaving for their hotels. Abhishek's father and Kartik already had the next place in their mind. Misha had also picked up the next stop on her journey. All of them went to sleep as soon as they finished dinner. Why? Because of their experience in Nashik, they wanted to leave early in the morning.

As the dawn broke and the moon settled, all of them loaded up their luggage and, with one last look at Nashik, left it with their final goodbye. Even though all of them were sitting in THEIR cars with THEIR families, the question and their response to it remained the same.

“Ready to go?”
“Ellora Caves, HERE WE COME!”

Will their next destination finally give them a chance to meet, or will they stay separated for the rest of their journey?

We Humans Always Think That In Order To Maintain Our Bond With Someone, We Need To Constantly Be In Touch With Them. Though In Reality, All We Need Is A Good ‘Connection’ With Them.

Chapter-3 “Tapola is Not Mini Kashmir”

Chapter-3

“Tapola is NOT Mini Kashmir”

We Humans Are Often Scared Of Trying New Things, Thinking 'Uncertainty" Is A Sign Of Failure. But In Reality, Human Life IS All About Trying New Things Out Without Caring About Results.

“We go on for 100 more meters, and my guts will give out.” *Abhishek, on the verge of vomiting, is trying his best to hold himself together.*
*“*C’mon dude, grow up. Even Avantika doesn’t get motion sickness, especially THIS badly.”
*“*Just sit with me for once. I’ll show you just how BAD it actually is.”
“I humbly decline your offer. May you rest in peace.”
Right now, what Abhishek hates more than his car sickness, is the fact that he can’t go and beat up Siddhant.
“How about we take a break near any Dhaba? Every one of us, except for one of course, can really appreciate some breakfast after such a long drive.”
Abhishek’s father parked at a roadside Dhaba, followed by Kartik’s car.

“What a poor soul. It's so unfortunate that he can’t even enjoy this Hot Vada Pav. Just look at this Batata Vada, not to mention the green chutney. Mhmm, even the bread is soft and fresh.”

“Can a man at least BREATHE peacefully?! What I need right now is something sour to eat, not your ‘VADA PAV.’ ”

“You pregnant or something?”

“NOT EVEN IN YOUR WILDEST DREAM!”

As both of them continued to fight, their food got cold.

”Finish up your food first, your quarrel can take place some other day. Be quick, or we won’t be able to leave for Tapola today.”

After a few more hours of travel,’ they’ all made it to Ellora Caves.

“Can you people hurry up? At this rate, we won’t even cover half of the Elorra caves till midnight. It's not like you have motion sickness now, right?”

Huff “ Nah, but it's also not like we are physically gifted, unlike you. We are humans. We need some rest as well.”

“Even your father and sister are ahead of us, and you have already kicked the bucket? Hurry up slowpoke, or we will leave you behind.”

His motion sickness is gone for now, but that doesn’t mean that it will be the end of Abhishek’s suffering.

They have barely done half the trek to the caves, and Abhishek is already at his limits.

After some MORE THAN REQUIRED time, they finally arrived at cave 1.

“1800 for a guide? Yeah, we are good. After all, we have got a guide of our own-
Looks at Abhishek, who is on his knees after the trek
Maybe hiring one guide won’t hurt after all.”

Heavily Breaths “No need, I can still do my job, after I catch my breath at least.”

A few minutes later

“All good?”
“Yea, I guess.”
“Then get your pedal for the medal and do your job, Mr. Outta breath.”

“Alright, So, Ellora caves consist of nearly 100 caves, but only 34 of ‘em are open to the public. Out of these 34,17 caves are Hindu caves,12 are Buddhist, and the remaining 5 are Jain caves.” “Anything about how these were built?”
“Not for sure. But some studies say that these caves were carved from a single huge rock and were formed from top to bottom using only basic tools like iron chisels and hammers.

Ellora caves contain many chambers with beautiful cave paintings like this one right here and well-sculptured statues. One such cha-" "With one such chamber being the Meditation hall right here."
*Claps "*Nice one Misha! Great explanation as always."
"Hehe, thanks papa. Now, let's get moving. We have got a lot more to explore here."

Misha and her family made it to Ellora caves before Abhishek and Siddhant (Because no one there got ***Motion sickness -_-****). While the boys have just started with their tour, Misha has already covered 4 caves. And with her pace, she might just finish it all and leave before Abhishek and Siddhant come even close to hitting 30.*

*After a few hours of tour, both parties made it to Cave 16, The Kailasa temple****.*** *At this point, the score is Abhishek and Siddhant with 10 caves covered. And Misha with 23 caves under her belt.*

The Kailasa temple, being Mahadev's temple, is a hot destination for tourists. Even though no pooja takes place here, people sure don't miss a chance to make it crowded, which often results in people 'losing' their family.

While Abhishek was trying to click some photos without being stomped down by the crowd, ***SOMEONE crashed*** *into him.*

*“Owwwch**!*** I'm sorry! I was soo focused on taking photos that I forgot to look back.” “It’s alright, I was also clicking some pic-

*As soon as both stood up and looked at each other, they froze on their feet. Both of them saw the face of someone whom they **never** could’ve expected to be there.*

What are you doing here?” “I-

Before Misha could even begin her sentence, her father from the crowd pulled her over.

“Thank god I finally got a hold of you. Unlike last time, I made sure to look over you. But the architecture here is just too good for me to let it go unnoticed! Now don’t get lost again, all right?”

“But Papa, I just saw Abhishek.”
“Huh, you must’ve mistaken someone else for him."
“No. I’m sure IT WAS Abhishek!”
“Where did you see him?”
“Here- *looks down* huh? Avantika? What are you doing here?”
Sobs, “Didi, Siddhant bhaiya got lost.”

Siddhant, who was with Avantika when they entered the cave, got swept away by the crowd. Luckily,

Avantika somehow managed to spot Misha. Though none of them have any clue about how they are gonna meet up with the rest.

“Don’t worry, your parents must be somewhere close; we will find them soon. Everything is alright, so just calm down, okay? *Misha hugs Avantika as she comforts her.*
“I see Ronnie from here. You two just hold onto me tightly and stick close.”
After some struggle, Misha successfully managed to reunite Avantika with her parents.
“What about Abhishek and Siddhant!? Where are they!?”
“No need to panic. They must be somewhere around here. Let’s get out of this cave first, wait for the crowd to clear up a bit, and then search for them. We will also inform the police and the staff for help.”
Kartik is the only adult who is able to remain calm because his daughter is with him. Though that doesn’t mean that he’s not worried about the boys. Even so, he tries his best to calm everyone down, especially Siddhant’s mother, who continues to grow more and more restless.

After the police managed to somewhat reduce the crowd in the cave, everyone started hoping that both of them would be found soon.

Cries “Where has my son gone!?”

“Aunty, please calm down. Nothing will happen to those two, just have some trust in god.”
Misha hands over her handkerchief to Siddhant’s mother.

With no update about those two, everyone starts to hope for a miracle, when-

*“*I see someone over there! It's Abhishek!”

Abhishek and Siddhant slowly emerged from a corner of the cave, with policemen supporting them. Though Siddhant is in good shape, blood continues to drip from Abhishek’s left arm.

“What happened to your arm!? Where were you two?! WH-”
“Madhav, relax. Let’s first treat their injuries and calm down; we can save questions for later.” *Kartik manages to calm Abhishek’s father down and then takes the boys to a nearby first aid camp.*

“Are you two fine now?”
“I’m doing fine, but idk about Abhishek.”
“I’m all good as well. They said that it’s nothing serious and I can use my left arm, it will just take a day or two to completely heal.”
“Good to know, still take some rest.”
“Yea, I will.”

After checking up on the boys, Ronnie asked them about what really happened in that cave. “Now, tell us about what happened to you two back there?”
“I was just taking some pictures. And before I knew it, I got separated from the group. I had no clue where everyone had gone, and as I was looking for any one of you, I spotted Siddhant. He got swept away by the crowd.”
“And that old hag!”
“Yea, so when I found him, he was stuck in a corner. There was an old, fat lady who wasn’t even letting him budge an inch. Somehow I pulled him out of that crowd, but-
“And that is when he got pushed by the crowd so hard, he crashed into a wall. That’s when he got injured.”
“And as I said, it's nothing serious. I’ll be completely fine in just a day or 2. Anyways, so after pulling him out of that corner, we somehow made it to a ‘less’ crowded place where 2 policemen found us.You people know the rest.”
“Seriously, all you people do is make everyone worry. Thank god that nothing bad happened, otherwise-”
“Now now, let’s all calm down. Y’know what they say,’ All’s well that ends well.’ How about we all go to a nearby restaurant and have some food? I’m sure we’ve got A LOT to catch up on, including our ‘newly arrived guests’, ”
Everyone agreed, and on Ronnie’s suggestion, started heading out of the cave.

Holds his hand tightly “Now don’t go missing, Bhaiya”
*Back when they had entered the cave, Siddhant held Avantika’s hand so she wouldn't get lost. (**Hmm, life really DOES come in full circle.)***

Siddhant, too embarrassed to even nod, just walked past everyone in a jiffy. The atmosphere switched from tense to joyous. As the cave filled with laughter, everyone slowly left for the exit. Except for two, who were coming at their own pace.

“Why do you sickheads always have to make everyone worry so much? Can’t you two just stay normal for ONE single trip?”
“It’s not like we did it on purpose. Also, you aren’t all clean, so you can call us dirty.”
“Huh? What did I do? I was the one who took care of your siste-”
“At least you could’ve informed us that you were coming on the trip as well. It's not like we would’ve gone any further without you.”
“Well…I just wanted to surprise you, people. Not the one who GOT surprised. Anyways, let’s just go already, everyone is far ahead of us.”
walks away
“Just one last thing.”
“Hm? Yea, what is it?”

“When you said that everyone got worked up, did you mean that **you** were worried as well?"
“…Yeah.
By the way, here’s a gift for you.” *Hands over the bracelet to Abhishek.*
“A bracelet?”
“Yeah, looks great right?”
“Sure does. It’s a perfect match with my T-shirt.”
“Of course it’s good, my choices are always the best.”
“Yeah yeah, whatever. *Whispers* Still, thanks for the gift.”

As an awkward silence grew between them, SOMEONE hopped in.

“What about me? Where’s my gift?”
“Uhh.., here.A packet of chips, perfect for you.”
“Thank yo- *opens it* IT’S HALF EMPTY!”
“Hehe, my bad. I was so hungry that I couldn't resist. Though- *snatches the packet from his hand* If you don’t want it, then I guess I'll take it. Cya!”
“HOLD UP! I NEVER SAID NO TO IT! GIMME MY CHIPS BACK!”
As Misha, with chips in her hand, ran towards the exit. Siddhant chased her down like there’s no tomorrow..Abhishek also ran after them, at his own pace.
“Wait for me, you two!”

After they made it to a restaurant, everyone sat in their seats as Misha and her father began narrating their side of the story. On how they started one day back, toured Nashik for 2 days, and left for Ellora caves. During that time, their food arrived. After finishing their food, they all exchanged souvenirs (which were supposed to be given when they made it back from the trip. But to save their hassle and also storage in their cars, they exchanged them now.), They enjoyed their food (Pav Bhaji, Bakharwadi, Solkhadi, etc) and had a 'blast'.It was nothing less than a feast filled with laughter and joy. Truly nothing less than a great reunion.

After an hour or 2, they all got their stuff and left for the Ajanta caves. Abhishek, Siddhant, and Misha decided to sit in the same car (till their next stop only)

'Move a bit more to the right, I can't stretch properly."
"It's a car, not some yoga class where you wanna stretch. Now stop complaining and sit still, you fatso"
"My waist is slimmer than yours, what do you mean by FATSO!?"
"Stop fighting for once, bruh. Lemme enjoy my food."
"YOU SHUT UP!" *which doesn't really seem like a good idea. Abhishek and Misha kept arguing till they reached the Ajanta Caves. Ronnie, while driving, was*

regretting his decision to drive with these three in the same car. As for his son, Siddhant was scared of even uttering a word, because whenever he said something, Abhishek and Misha would shut him up completely.

After almost 2 DREADFUL hours of driving, they made it to the Ajanta caves.

“The Ajanta caves are made up of 30 Buddhist caves, of which only 29 are counted since 1 is incomplete. Even though these caves are made from the same tools used in the Ellora caves, the Ajanta caves were actually built **before the** Ellora caves existed. The pai-”

“Dayum. And here I thought that Abhsehk was the only nerd we had. You ain’t half bad yourself, Nerd #2”

“I’m just reading it all from my phone, you idiot. Of course, I'm smart, but that doesn’t mean that I know about everything in the world. Even Abhishek searches things up online before rambling about them.”

“Unlike last time, how about we go and **actually** finish up exploring **all** the caves?”

”I’m down, tell that to this Big Mac.”

“You dare to call me fat one more time, and I'll beat you up so bad that there won’t even be ashes left of you!”

“Alright you two, stop fighting like hungry cats. Let’s keep going, we are halfway done with these caves, just 15 more to go.”
As it began to grow dark, all of them came down to their last few caves.
“Heyo, nerd #1. Tell me, what’s the difference b/w this cave and the one we saw a few minutes back?”
“This one was made during the Hinayan Phase, and the previous one was built during the Viharaya-Mahayan Phase.”
“Hima- what?”
“Caves built during the Hinayan Phase were meant for Mediation and praying. Whereas, the caves built during the Viharaya-Mahayan Phase were built with the purpose of living in them. Both were built very well with cave paintings and sculptures.”
“Hm, maybe if I try, then I can even draw something like this.”
“Nope. These paintings were made using techniques like Fresco and Tempera.YOU, on the other hand, can’t even paint with a full drawing kit. And you think you can draw on rocks? Hell naww.” “Alright, alright. Misha and others are at the last cave anyway; we should hurry up and catch up with them.”
“Just one more photo,
Click
done. Let’s go now.”

All of them left for Tapola by 4 P.M and halted in Ahilyanagar after a long 4-hour drive. Tired from all

the ‘drama’ today, everyone went straight to bed without eating dinner. The next morning, the one who regretted it the most was Misha.

“So, does anyone know where Misha has gone?”
“DID MY DAUGHTER GET LOST!? I REALLY SHOULDN'T HAVE LET GO OF HER, IT’S ALL MY FAULT!”
“Relax uncle, I just saw her go back to your room. And judging by her expressions, she must’ve eaten a ‘little’ more. No need to panic. She must be in the washroom right now.”
As Siddhant tried to calm Kartik down, Madhav and Ronnie gave Kartik a snarly look, as if telling him to ‘remain calm’ now that HIS child has gone missing.

Misha managed to arrive just before the ferry left for Tapola. And, luckily for them, it was raining a while ago. That rain resulted in creating one of the most beautiful views of their lives.

Tall mountains shrouded in mist, as if clouds had descended on the mountains. The sound of water flowing down from waterfalls sounded nothing less than music to their ears. The clean water in the river almost made it look like a transparent portal to another world.

Soon they reached the land and then went ahead towards their resort. On the way, they thought about going for a swim.

“The water seems so fresh that I wanna strip down and go for a dive right now.”
“You can try. But the water here is about 100 ft. deep. So yeah, good luck coming out alive. Tapola is-”
Before Abhishek could even begin his sentence, Siddhant stopped him
“Not today, dude, and not tomorrow as well. This is the ONE place where we don’t wanna hear your yap. After such a view on the way here, NO ONE, I repeat, NO ONE cares about the history of this place.Not even the readers. Just look at Swaagy, he’s on the verge of falling asleep, and yet he’s trying to make his script for the upcoming chapters. Just chill out for once!”
“Alright, alright. My bad bro. Also, YOU are the one who needs to chill out.”
Siddhant’s crashout on Abhishek was valid because after such a view, there really is no need for words to explain the beauty of this place.

“All right everyone, listen up. We are only going to stay here till tomorrow, so make sure to explore Tapola till your heart’s content. We have some plans for tomorrow evening, so plan your activities wisely. And don’t go to a risky place just for some photos, especially you boys.”

“You people can stay and talk more. I'll go and relax in the jacuzzi. That, along with the view from the balcony, is everything I need to end the day on a good note."

“End the day? What about exploring?”

“Exploring Tapola won’t take more than a day. And above all, we are here to enjoy. Just forcing ourselves to travel when our bodies can’t even move properly won’t be any fun. Let’s just *yawn*
relax for today and enjoy the environment.”

As Abhishek left for his room, Siddhant and Misha looked at him with disappointment in their eyes.

“Leave that lazy old geezer. The three of us can go and play table tennis in the hall above.”

“Sounds good, let’s go Avantika.”

On Misha’s suggestion, all three of them left for the game hall above to play table tennis. Meanwhile, all three fathers were tired from travelling and went straight to bed. As for the mothers, they decided to go out, sit on the bench, and enjoy their evening tea while gossiping. In their own ways, all of ‘em were having their ‘moment’.

The Next Day

Everyone woke up early in the morning,wayy before breakfast time, and divided themselves into two groups. Group A was made up of Abhishek, Misha, and Siddhant & Group B consisted of all the adults. Avantika had to stay with the adults because group A

was going for Kayaking, and with water that deep, no one was gonna take Avantika there. Though it's not like group B stayed idle for the whole day. They hired an electric buggy for sightseeing. On one hand, Group A was sailing over the waters. And on the other hand, Group B chose the land route for their venture.

“Oh god, what a beautiful world you have created. The sun was slowly rising from behind that mountain, with its bright light illuminating the sky. The mist dressing up mountains, just like a newlywed bride.This soothing sound of water flowing as my Kayak sails over it, leaving a trail behind.Oh, what a beautiful da-
water splashes over her face.
Coughs, WHO THE HECK WAS THAT MANNERLESS BOAR*!?? While Misha was busy admiring nature, Siddhant and Abhishek decided to have a boat race. Or in their case, the Kayak race. Both of them got a heavy start and soon enough got blitzed by Misha, splashing water all over her.*

“I won!”
Huff “No, I won. You just got ahead because I slowed down, thanks to Misha getting in the way.” “Yea, keep weeping. It won’t change the fact that I’m the winner!”
“How about another round?”
“You bet.”

As soon as they both turned back to race again, the view in front froze both of them on their feet. With his mouth wide open from astonishment, Siddhant asked
“Abhishek, are we still on Earth?”
“Yeah, I think so.”
“But I don't. This looks nothing less than Heaven.”
looks at Siddhant, “For as long as I've known you, I can say one thing for sure. If we were to die right now, neither one of us is going to Heaven. Still, this view IS what Heaven must be like.”
While both of them were busy enjoying the ambience, Misha came from behind and punched those two really hard on their head.
“OWWWWCHHHH!!
What’s wrong with you!? Can’t we even enjoy some time admiring nature?”
“ ‘Admiring nature!? What’s wrong with ME!?’ YOU TWO DUMBOS TELL ME WHAT’S WRONG WITH YOUR HEADS!? JUST HOW DUMB CAN SOMEONE POSSIBLY BE TO BE RUINING THE AESTHETICS OF SUCH A PLACE!?”
Misha’s anger was radiating such an ominous aura that even the birds had to fly away from their nests. So of course, the ‘poor’ boys just had to zip up their mouths and listen to her scolding.

Meanwhile, Group B was having a delightful morning. Along with taking pictures of the Flora and Fauna, they were also going off for walks in between

to FEEL the nature. Avanatika even got a chance to feed some birds. By 10 P.M, they all made it back to their resort for breakfast.

Eating “Mmmm, they’ve nailed this Kaju Usal for sure.”
“Yep. That, along with this spicy Aluchi vadi, is absolute cinema.”
“You two just do not understand. All that is good.BUT! Nothing comes even close to beating Solkhadi. I mean, just look at this dude, it goes so perfectly well with the weather today.”
For the first time in probably months, Abhishek was on a par with Misha and Siddhant in terms of eating, especially during breakfast.
*“*Everyone, listen up! I’ve got an announcement to make. I have booked a ferry for a few hours. After breakfast, we will all go sightseeing!”
“Yayyy!”
Among everyone, Avantika was the one who was most excited about the ferry ride cuz she didn’t get a chance to sail in a Kayak.

After some time, their ferry arrived. Everyone on-boarded. Their ride lasted till evening. As the sun began to set, they all saw SOMEONE.

“Is that another ferry coming this way?”
“Yea, but…why is it moving so slowly?”

“Let’s go, maybe their ferry got damaged. We should help ‘em out.”
With a helping hand, they came near that ferry. Little did they know, it was one such case where ‘their blessings were more needed than their prayers.’
“Is that man really going to do what I think he’s going to do?”
“Maybe, it’s really a-”
“Just shut up and watch, you two.”
As the sun sank, and with Dusk coming to an end. With its light falling on the waters, A new Dawn came into SOMEONE’S life.

The man on the ferry. With his knee on the ground and head high in the sky, he pulled a small box out of his pocket. Inside it was a ring. Not just any ring though. That ring had the power to be able to bind him and his ‘other half’, who was standing in front of him, into a life-lasting contract. As everyone crossed their fingers, he proposed this,
*“*Will you marry me*?”*
Everyone’s heart paused for a second. With tears rolling down her cheeks, she replied with a simple answer to his simple question.
“Yes. Yes, I will!”
As that man carefully placed that ring on her finger, a huge round of applause came from a ferry nearby. While some were shedding tears of happiness, others were celebrating heavily. Everyone there returned to

their resort wearing huge smiles on their faces and a memory that will last them forever.

On the way back, Misha was the only one still 'living' that moment.

*"*Keep daydreaming like that and it won't be long before you fall on the ground."
Punches him in his guts "How about I make YOU fall on the ground?"
"Oww! You monster! Why do you always have to punch me so hard?"
"And why do you have to ruin my mood, EVERYTIME!? I was just thinking about the way he proposed to her. That location, that timing, and the way he did it.
Giggles You monkeys can never understand such stuff.*"*
*"*You are saying such things as if you already know how you wanna be proposed."
"Maybe, but not really. When that moment comes, I wanna see the efforts **he** has put in for me. What really matters is how much he cares for me. And how hard is he willing to try, for my sake." "Welp, at least now we know which one of us will go out alone."
kicks him from behind "Oww. Dude, it's not my fault that you will stay single forever."
"You got a death wish today?"

“Nope,im good.Oh, btw, I forgot to tell y'all about today’s function. It’s my parents’ marriage anniversary. The function will start at 8.”
“8!? It’s 7:45 already! I gotta go and get dressed! I’ll cya you two at the hall.Bye!”
looks at Abhishek, “I guess we should get going as well? ”
“Yea right. Ronnie's uncle isn’t the ‘late-coming’ type of guy anyway.”

During the function, before the final cake cutting part, SOMEONE came on stage to perform.

Misha, who was highly impressed by the Lavani dance, decided that she would give it a shot. For context, she’s as bad a dancer as good a singer. Even so, she decided to perform regardless of how bad her form was.

She appeared on the stage in a Nauvari Saree. With a crescent on her forehead, a nathani in her nose, along with some jewellery equidded, green bangles on her wrist, and a blue-orange saree starting from her shoulders, all the way to her feet, and then even further below. She appeared no less than a true Maharashtrian, completely soaked in ***our*** *culture.*

She called Siddhant over to join her for the performance. What she needed was a singer, and the last person she wanted for that was Siddhant. Even

so, it seemed like a good opportunity for both of them to try something new. Something they never would've even thought of trying.

As both of them began their performance, the obvious took place. They started fumbling. Almost every step Misha took made it seem like she was trying to balance herself in that dress, rather than actually dance.And Siddhant? He sang every lyric he knew, from all the songs he had heard throughout his lifetime. All except the one he was ACTUALLY supposed to sing. Even though it all seemed like a disaster, the hall was somehow filled with laughter and joy. Everyone was cheering them for giving their best shot.

On the other hand, Abhishek, instead of participating, was enjoying their performance. He was enjoying the delicacy of Tapola, its vibrant Strawberries.

"Bhaiya, can you bring another slice of that Strawberry pastry?"
"You finished it already? Your appetite sure is growing faster than your height."
"Hehe"
"All right, just sit here and wait for me. I'll be right back."

As Abhishek left the table, he began getting random thoughts. Thoughts, which were completely illogical.

And yet, they seemed to somehow have made a place inside his head.

Seeing his childhood friends dance & perform with each other was just a fun activity for him. Yet, a feeling of uneasiness grew inside him. A feeling that felt like something was eating him up from inside, with no way of stopping it. It felt like, with each moment passing by, Misha and Siddhant grew closer and closer to each other. And on the other hand, the distance between them and Abhishek continued to widen.

Abhishek was soo focused on these thoughts that he lost his balance and fell. Luckily, his left arm had recovered by then, so nothing serious happened. And thanks to that fall, he came back to his senses. No one had noticed his fall, as everyone there was hooked up to the ongoing performance.

Abhishek quickly grabbed that piece of pastry and went back to his table.

When he fell, his plate did not break, but the bracelet that Misha had gifted him got some cracks on it. For some reason, it felt like ***that bracelet wasn't the only place where cracks had emerged****. It could've been 'a change in the size of a cog in a big machine' or 'ripples popping up in a calm lake.' But one thing*

*was for sure: this small incident had managed to bend the **thread of fate**, even just a little.*

The next morning, they all woke up late from partying too much last night. Though sleeping till 10 wasn't that bad cuz everyone woke up refreshed. They all had gotten lucky that it was rainy-monsoon type of weather for as long as they stayed there. Since they were already behind schedule, and traffic was their mortal enemy as always, they left without even having breakfast.

After clicking their one last group 'photo' in Tapola, they bid their farewell to the 'descended heaven', and left 'where the winds led them.'

Next stop-LONAVALA!

We Humans Often Hesitate From Expressing Ourselves, Fearing That If We Let Our Emotions Out, They Might Get Out Of Our Control. But We Always Forget That What TRULY Makes Us A Human IS The Fact That We CAN Express Our Emotions.

Chapter-4 "Nature is the Mother of All Horrors"

Chapter-4

“Nature is the Mother of all Horrors”

We Humans Assume That Happiness Is Only Found In The Form Of Laughter. Though That’s Not Necessary. Sometimes, It Can Also Be Found In Its Other Forms, One Such Being ’Horror’.

On their way to Lonavala, Abhishek’s mother got a call from her parents. Her mother wasn’t doing well for the past few days and had fallen sick. Since Pune falls between Tapola and Lonavala, Misha suggested that they all go and pay them a visit.
As it was already getting dark, they all decided to halt at Abhishek’s grandparents’ house for the night and leave early the next morning.

Note: Throughout their entire road trip, even though all three of them are in their own cars, they are able to communicate via call. That’s how Misha got to know about Abhishek’s Grandama’s health.

The moment they entered the property, SOMEONE greeted them with a very warm welcome

*Falls on the ground"*Haha, c'mon now, Pluto. Let me enter the house at least."

As soon as Abhishek set his foot inside the house,Pluto-their pet dog, who had gone to the vet last time, jumped on top of him and started licking his face.

"He couldn't meet you the last time we were here, so ofc he's going to compensate for that now." "What a lovely reunion! Now, get up and move outta the way so we all can come in."

Siddhant and Misha helped shift some stuff into the house. Meanwhile, Abhishek took Pluto back to his dog house on the 1st floor and gave him his lunch.

"Aunty, how are you feeling now?"
"Better than yesterday, Beta. Still, you all didn't have to come all the way over here, just for the sake of this old fossil."
"Wdym by an old fossil? You are still young. *Looks at Misha* Younger than SOMEONE ik. *Misha pinches Siddhant's arm.* Yowwch! Have you gone senile or something!? Who pinches someone like THAT!? You almost pulled my skin out!"
"Now now, let's all settle down and have some evening tea. I've got snacks for you kids as well."

Siddhant hugs Abhishek's grandpa "Now that's the uncle I know!"
*Abhishek arrives after washing his hands "*Spare some for me too."
"Don't worry kids, we've got plenty of snacks in this house. I knew that we would have a long talk about your travel, so I brought some extra snacks in the afternoon. Come, let's all sit down."

As they sat down in the hall, all of them began talking about their travels in the past few days. What places have they gone to, what kind of food are they eating, the problems they faced, and almost all the incidents that happened to them. The evening became so much fun that Abhishek's Nani started to feel better.
Their storytime went on for so long that it got wayy past their dinner time. Everyone went straight to sleep, completely tired from all that chit-chat in the evening.

After a few hours, in the middle of the night, Abhishek went to the kitchen to drink some water.
On his way back, he saw SOMEONE.
A black figure in the hallway slowly moving forward, away from Abhishek.
It was walking weirdly, as if in 'sleep'.Abhishek, scared as heck, was about to scream, but he stopped for a second and thought to himself-
*"*Okay, so it's definitely not an illusion, nor is it a shadow. It's something that's 'alive and dead' at the

same time. Even so, I can’t back off now. I’m Abhishek, not Siddhant. I can’t turn my back on something like this. And what if it’s a thief? Well, given the circumstances, I SURE DO hope that it's a thief. I can take on a thief for sure, but ‘anything’ other than that ….I'll pass.”

Abhishek gathered up all the courage he possibly could and silently started chasing that figure. After a few minutes of chase, a sharp corner came. Till now, that figure was ahead of him, but when Abhishek took that turn, he saw that-

there was nothing?

He looked around.

His gaze fell out of a window nearby, on the tree in their backyard. The same tree where, when they all entered the house, they took a photo together. A swing was attached to its branch. In the evening, Misha and Avantika were swinging on it.

*But now, that swing has gone **silent**. Right now, that tree was looking as scary as beautiful as it appeared during the evening. Near that tree, Abhishek spotted SOMEONE.*

That night must’ve been Abhishek’s unluckiest night for sure. Why? Because that SOMEONE, was a shadow.

Which, in reality, was just the shadow of some old stuff that was dumped nearby.

The timing was so perfect that, to Abhishek, it appeared as if a woman with long hair was standing

near that swing. The hairs that appeared on that shadow's face were nothing more than the shadow of that tree's vines. Her figure was almost as big as their car. And the worst part? For a few seconds, it looked like 'she' was looking right into Abhishek's eyes, ready to rip 'em out.

All this scared him so badly that his survival instincts got triggered. Without wasting any time screaming, he rushed back into his room, fully sealed it up, turned all the lights on, and covered himself up with blankets.

That same night, Siddhant also went out to the kitchen. Since he didn't had anything for dinner, he tried sneaking something from the fridge back into his room. When he reached his room, he tried to silently open the door, without alerting anyone, when-

A vase near the wall clock fell.
Siddhant went to pick it up when he saw a mysterious black figure walking towards the entrance door.
His heart skipped a beat. Just before calling for help, he thought to himself-
"Normally, I would just scream and run back to my room & let someone handle it. But this time, Abhishek's grandma is sick, and the whole family is already worked up about that. Adding another

burden on their shoulders won't be an ideal thing. For the sake of everyone's safety, I should take this matter into my own hands! C'mon Siddhant! This is your chance to show everyone what you've got!"

Siddhant slowly followed that black figure.

After some time, they were about to enter the hall when-

Siddhant accidentally kicked a table. The glass on top fell and shattered into pieces.

Siddhant gathered them all up and threw 'em into a dustbin. But by then, he had lost track of 'her'. He entered the hall and looked outside the window. He saw the same tree Abhishek had seen before. Except that he saw it from a different perspective. So to him, it appeared like a normal tree. He decided to go out and get some fresh air.

As he sat on the swing, the wind picked up its pace. A cold breeze shivered his entire body. Just when he was enjoying the cold, silent night, street dogs started barking. Scared, yet with a brave face on, he decided he should go and check the 1st floor out as well.

As soon as he got up, his face got stuck in the tree's vines. Already scared, Siddhant's shivering body fell numb. All he could do was let out a scream-

"AAAAAHHHHH!!!"

hoping someone will come to his rescue.

*Everyone in the house woke up, including the neighbours. They all quickly rushed to the veranda. In the backyard, they saw Siddhant, tangled up in vines, sobbing and begging for help. "*PLEASE! DON'T EAT ME!! I DIDN'T EVEN TOOK BATH TODAY!*"*

Kartik freed him and took him back into the house. Before he could say anything, another loud scream came from the other side of the house. It was from the storeroom.

When everyone reached there, they saw Misha, covered in boxes that had fallen on her. No one had any idea how she reached here, including 'her'.Abhishek's father took her and Siddhant into the hall, turned on the lights, and gave them some water. Siddhant continued where he had left off.

As he was telling everyone about his experience, Avantika raised a question

"Where's Abhishek Bhaiya?"

*Everyone started looking around, but couldn't find him. Already tensed up, everyone just had one thought in their min*d,

"Maybe it's 'her' doing."

And their explanation for why only Abhishek went missing? Because his grandparents are the ones who own the place, it must have been something related to that.

*Interrupting their conspiracies, Misha suggested that they should just check his room. "*Maybe, he's just sleeping."

“Sleeping? After so much noise? HELL NAWW*”*
Punches him “SHUT UP! WHAT KIND OF BEST FRIEND ARE YOU?!”
When they entered Abhishek’s room, they found him shivering in fear, covered up under 2 blankets.
*“*Thank god he’s safe. See, I told y'all already that he’ll be fine.”
rolling her eyes “Yea, right.”
“Abhishek! Get outta bed u scardy cat. See, even I’m not scared.*” said Siddhant, with his numb body, unable to react anyway.*
As Abhishek got up and took his blanket off, the light went out.
*“*Don’t worry, I've got my phone.”
As soon as Misha turned on the flashlight from her phone and pointed it towards Abhishek. What they saw, ***shook their souls.***
It was Abhishek’s face that had gone pale. And the dark circles under his eyes worked as a cherry on the cake, or in this case, Abhishek.
Every single one who had come to ‘rescue’ Abhishek, screamed in fear.

AAAAHHHHHHH!!!!

The night ended on a ‘safe and loud’ note.

P.S: *The black figure everyone saw was Misha, who was sleepwalking.*

Abhishek and family were sleeping on the 1st floor, and the rest were on the ground floor, including Siddhant.
Then how did Misha reach from 1st to the ground floor?
She had gone to the first floor to use the washroom. On her way back, she dozed off in the hallway.
As for how she reached back down-
When that sharp turn came, she actually entered Pluto's dog house. And from there, somehow walked down the stairs safely.
After 'scaring' Siddhant, she accidentally went into the storeroom and tripped over.
The impact from her fall made all the boxes fall onto her. When Siddhant screamed, she woke up.
Confused and scared of waking up in another place, covered by boxes, and with such a loud scream heard from outside, Misha also screamed.

Somehow, all this commotion resulted in a faster recovery of Abhishek's grandma. She managed to recover quite a lot in a single night. Maybe all this helped shift her mind from stress to something else?

The next morning, they all bid their farewell to Abhishek's grandparents, AND to that tree. Since they had left early in the morning (cuz no one could sleep last night), they got to see the sunrise on their way to Lonavala.

*"*What a great day! Getting to drive early in the morning, on such a smooth road.Mhmm!, truly sensational!*" Ronnie doesn't really have many likes or dislikes. But, as a frequent driver, he sure does appreciate good roads whenever he gets to drive on one.*

*"*Absolutely! Govt. has finally done something good for once."

"Yep! This Mumbai Pune Missing Link Bridge is one such project that takes the aesthetics of Lonavala to another level. I mean, just look at this view!"

One thing that has helped to maintain the friendship of Madhav, Ronnie, and Kartik is their love for driving. For them, who had some 'rough' experiences back in Nashik, thanks to traffic, getting to drive on such a free road is one heck of an experience.

On the bridge, high above the ground, and with the Sun following them, they passed through their 2nd tunnel.

After a few minutes

"When is this tunnel going to end?"

"Probably not for another 5-6 minutes. We are only halfway through."

"HUH! Halfway!? Just how long is this tunnel?"

"About 8.9km long, making it India's longest road tunnel."

"Such a long tunnel, with almost the same width as that bridge. Krazy!"

Some time later

“All right people! Welcome to Lonavala!”
“We have already booked rooms for everyone. You all can go and freshen up.”
“And then we will have breakfast. After that, we’ll be heading to our 1st stop of the day-” “Bhushi Dam Waterfall!”
“You three sure are in sync today. Nice one!”
While Siddhant was busy complimenting all three fathers, everyone grabbed their luggage and went inside the hotel.

Surrounded by mountains, with a light rain and clouds covering up the sky, some mist to boost the aesthetics of the place, and finally, a lush cave nearby. The beauty of Lonavala is really hard to explain in words. One can’t fathom it through text alone.
Some things are meant to be experienced in person, rather than read about.
Still, the hotel all three of them had picked has some of the best views they possibly could’ve asked for.

They all quickly finished up their breakfast and left, without wasting any time. Why? Because they were going to leave tomorrow as the weather wasn’t going to stay ‘light’ forever, and tomorrow might not turn out to be as good a day for travel as today is.

Bhushi Dam Waterfall is a waterfall where the water from the Indrayani River flows over. During the monsoon, the amount of water and its flow increase rapidly.
Luckily for them, that light rain managed to do the same.

Water splashes. “It’s Sooo Cold!”
“And that’s what makes it more fun! Wooohoo!”
“Pipe down,you two! Can’t you two just sit down and enjoy the flowing water?”
*Throws some water at Misha “*Haha! Not today,’ aunty’! We are still young, unlike you*.” “*AUNTY YOUR MUM! HOLD UP,YOU MONKEYS!”
Meanwhile, Avantika was watching from the sides cuz the water flow had risen up, and it was too risky to let her go up the stairs.
*“*Don’t run or you might slip, Misha!”
“Don’t worry papa, I won't! I just gotta *grunts* catch these two.”
“Not in this lifetime, you hag!” *Luckily no one slipped,*
for now at least

About an hour later, they left for their next stop.
The Fort, honoured with Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj’s presence during his time,
The Lohagad Fort.

Running "Hurry up! Or we'll leave you behind.
"C'mon, Siddhant, hold up for a minute. It's already raining. Can't you see the water flowing down these stairs?"
"That's what makes it fun. Water staircases are always the best! You can come at your own pace, we'll see you at the top."
"Hold u-"
trips "Owwch!"
As soon as Misha fell, everyone's attention shifted from the stunning ambience to her. The first one to rush to her aid was-
"Misha, are you all right!? Did you break a bone or something!?"
"No papa, I'm fine. It's just *ahh* it's just a sprain, I can still do the trek."
"What do you mean you can do the trek!? WHAT IF-"
"Uncle, please calm down. Before anything, we should focus on treating Misha, or her sprain might get even worse."

After Siddhant calmed down Kartik, and finished wrapping bandages around Misha's ankle, he and his father took her to a nearby corner where they all thought up what to do next. Kartik suggested that he and his family go back to the hotel, and the rest of them can continue. That's when Siddhant said-
"There's no need to back, uncle. It won't be fun if the whole family isn't travelling together. After all, that IS the whole purpose of this trip."

“But you can clearly see that she’s in no condition to mo-”
“That won’t be an issue. I can just give her a Piggyback ride.”
“But you won't be able to handle her. What if, this time, you BOTH fall? This is too risky.” “Kartik, I know how you are feeling. But you can trust my son. If there’s one useful thing about him, it’s his strength.”
“Thank you, pa- huh??”
“You can trust your daughter with him. And it’s not like this will be their first time. These kids have been doing all such plays even before they learned how to write. They will be fine.”
After some more tries, and with others convincing Kartik and his wife, they finally agreed.
*“*All right, fine. But, make sure you are careful.”
“No need to worry about it. This is a piece of cake for me. Alright,**Off We Go!”**
“Are you sure? Carrying me all the way over there won’t be an easy task for you.”
“Yea no doubt. You are just as heavy as scary you are.”
“What did you just say!? I’ll throw you all the way down if you dare say one more thing about my weight!”
“Alright, alright.Chillout! Now buckle your belts up, cuz we are about to take off.”
“Huh? What do you m-”
“3…2…1..Go!”

sprints “YO SLOW DOWN, YOU DONKEY!”
“TOO LATE! THIS DONKEY IS ON NITRO NOW!”

During all this, SOMEONE just watched all of them, not even taking a step forward to aid her.
When Misha tripped, everyone rushed to help her. Everyone but ONE.
Abhishek turned back and saw Misha on the floor, with blood coming out of her ankle. Before he could understand what had happened, Siddhant shoved him aside and rushed downwards. After her father, the first one to reach her WAS Siddhant. The one who SUCCESSFULLY managed to help her was also Siddhant.
Meanwhile, Abhishek just stood still. Unable to take any action, he found his knowledge ***worthless****.*
*“*What’s the point of knowing so much when I can’t even use this knowledge to help my people out*?”*
*He thought to himself. “*What good of a leader am I, when I can't even aid my own friend? Even god won’t side with someone whose feet freeze when it’s the moment to take action. It’s not about how serious her injury is; it’s about how dire the situation was.
God forbid, but what if something like this had happened when we would’ve trekked even higher? Or when she was near the edge?”
While Abhishek was sinking deeper and deeper into his thoughts, SOMEONE’S voice came from above.

“Idk what’s going on in your head, but we will leave ya behind for sure if you don’t hurry up! I can’t carry the two of you, so come up NOW*!”*
In Japan, there’s a concept known as ‘Kotadama’, which translates to ‘spirit of words’.Kotadama means that spoken sounds carry vibrational energy that can actively shape reality, influence the environment, AND ***affect the mind and soul.***
Unknowingly, the Kotadama of Siddhant’s word must’ve been high at that moment. Why? Because his words somehow pulled Abhishek out of his head, before he drowned in his thoughts.
Abhishek looked up and saw Siddhant wayy ahead of him, looking down and calling his name. With a big inhale and an even bigger exhale, Abhishek shouted-
*“*You just focus on yourself! If you look back even once, I’ll get ahead of you!”
“We will see about that, slowpoke!”
With a wide smile on his face, Abhishek sprinted towards the top.

Abhishek, being wayy behind Siddhant, and Siddhant having to carry Misha along with her, made their competition ‘fair’.Their ‘competition’ ended in a tie as both of them were at some kind of disadvantage.

After reaching the fort, they entered through the gate and began exploring. Siddhant had dropped Misha as soon as they reached the top.

The view from the top was so breathtaking that it helped shift everyone's mind from what just happened to Misha and helped them explore the fort with a refreshed mind.

After exploring for about an hour, they went back to their hotel as Misha couldn't walk properly. And ofc, Siddhant carried her all the way down as well.

"Are ya fine now?"
"Still can't walk. Though I AM doing better than before. Also, thanks for the piggyback." "No prob. Helping an old hag like you isn't that big of a dea-" *throws a pillow at him* "Say that one more time and the next thing I'll throw at you will be no less than a butcher's knife."
"Alright, my bad. Btw, we are leaving for Tiger's point now."
"Gotcha, take care y'all."
"I'll also bring something for ya. Maybe something even better than that rock I gave ya when we were in Ellora caves."

Soon enough, Siddhant and Abhishek left for Tiger's point, along with their families.
As for Misha's parents, even after she tried convincing them so much to go and have fun, they still decided to stay back with her.

The weather continued to clear up as they followed the route which led them to the highest peaks of Lonavala, the Tiger's point. When they reached their destination , the weather had completely cleared up, and it appeared as if ***the sky had opened up.*** *The view was so surreal that it was hard to believe they were still standing on the ground****.***

The mountains stretched as far as the eye could see. Plateaus, so big that they reached the clouds. And the rapid wind, going so fast that it could probably fly a child away.

As they all continued to explore further, Siddhant started looking for a gift for Misha to fulfil his promise.
Both his and Abhishek's sight landed on a flower-one that stood at a peak, close to the edge. The view from the point was incredible!
Though both 'found' the same flower, there existed a time gap between them,i.e., the first one to find it was Siddhant. He just took a few photos of it from different angles and left. Abhishek found it a few minutes after Siddhant had left.
He wanted to make sure that Siddhant couldn't get his hands on it, and in desperation, plucked it so that he could give it to Misha to make 'himself' feel compensated for his failure at the Lohagad Fort.
Since they all were feeling empty, because of Misha and her family's absence, Madhav decided to call

Kartik and told him to come to Lonavala Lake with his family. He planned to get everyone to watch the sunset together, to end the day on a good note.

By the time they all got back from Tiger's point, Misha and her family made it to a picnic spot Ronnie and Kartik had already picked in advance.

"Took you people long enough."
"C'mon, we came back from the HIGHEST peaks in Lonavala, ofc it was gonna take time. Still, we haven't missed the sunset."
"Relax, I was teasing you. I've already made some arrangements. Let's all sit down and enjoy the view from here."
As the sun slowly started fading away into the water, Siddhant showed Misha the photos he had clicked at the Tiger's point, including that flower.
"Wow! What a view! It's looking soo good. And especially this flower, did you pluck it?" "Nope. It was looking soo good that I decided to leave it there only. The view was good, but that flower made it 10x better."
"Can't believe I'm saying this to YOU.Good job, Siddhant! Leaving that flower there WAS the right call. Maybe someone in the future will find it,and also appreciate its beauty." "Maybe ye. But someone could also pluck it."
"If someone dares to even touch that flower, I'll beat 'em up myself."

”With a damaged foot? Yeah, I’d like to see you try.”
“How about I give you a demonstration right here, right now?”
“I apologize, my lord.” *Both laughs it off*
“I’ll bring some ice cream for ya, be right back.”

During this entire conversation, Abhishek didn’t even utter a single word.
As soon as he realised how bad a deed he had done, he slowly started moving back to his car. Filled with regret for his actions, drowning in despair for his desperation, and unable to look at his own reflection in his car’s window, Abhishek crushed that flower, just like how he was crushing ‘himself’.
All this is a result of what some would call ‘OVERthinking.’
While Siddhant was away looking for an ice cream shop, Abhishek went to a dustbin nearby and slammed it in.

Siddhant came with a small bag.

Pulls something out of the bag. “Here, a popsicle for ya.”
“Huh? What about Misha? You had gone to bring ice cream for HER, right?”
“Welp. They said that this was their last dual-popsicle, and they were outta single ones. So I got an ice cream cone for her. And judging by her

expression, I’d say she’s loving it. Now hurry up and take it, it's already melting.”
*With a **smile** on his face, Abhishek* said, “I’ll pass for today. I’m saving some space for dinner.”
Gives a strange look to Abhishek “Eh? Alright ig, your loss.”

*As the final ray of sun disappeared, and the sky started to get dark, all of them returned to their rooms. That picnic sure was a wonderful idea to end the day. Everyone enjoyed it. Everyone except **one.** After dinner, everyone went straight to bed and fell into a slumber. Everyone except **one**, who was sinking deeper and deeper into his own heart.*

We Humans Always Settle Down With Our Current Circumstances, Which Often Results In Criticism Towards Change Of Time. However, Change In Time IS What One Should Get Accustomed To.

Chapter-5 "Amboli Ghat:The Land Of Biodiversity"

Chapter-5

“Amboli Ghat: The Land Of Biodiversity”

We Humans Are Always In a Delusion That We Have Plenty Of Time. Though, If Even a Tree Can’t Hold Onto Its Leaves Forever, Then Who Are We To Think That We Can Hold Onto The Time We Are Left With?

The next day, they all left for Amboli Ghat. But before that, they decided to head to the Karla caves. The Aadishakti Aai Ekvira Temple is located NEAR Karla caves. Paying a visit there was a great way to start their day off. Karla caves fall under the Kamshet region, which is famous for its waterfalls, dams, and Lime-green grass. All this allowed them to end their trip to Lonavala on a good note.

By evening, they were on the winding roads of Amboli Ghat. As they continued on that route, great rock walls began to follow them. And waterfalls streaming down from these rock walls really made it seem like a ‘Naturistic’ road trip. But what actually took it all up a notch was what they saw about a mile later.

From above the dense forests of Amboli valley, a single ray of light fell.

Just one ray

It was a HUGE Golden God Ray which covered a large chunk of that forest.

Watching such a view from high above the ground, on the roads of Amboli Ghat, shows what it truly means to be 'The Land Blessed By God'.

After witnessing 'Nature's Masterpiece', all of them reached their first spot in Amboli Ghat-Amboli Main Waterfall.

"Watch your step, ok? This time I won't save ya"

"As if you managed to do so the last time I fell."

"How about focusing ahead? If you don't wanna break a bone, that is."

"How about SHUTTING UP? If you don't wanna break a bone, that is."

The way to the waterfall was a bit difficult. Why? Because thanks to the monsoon, the stairs leading to the waterfall had become a 'water stairway'- something which Misha wasn't a big fan of, especially after what had happened last time.Though that definitely DID NOT stop Siddhant from sprinting his way to the waterfall.

For Misha not to slip this time, Siddhant suggested something to her-

*"*If you are gonna move THAT slow, then how about holding my hand? That way we can keep our pace right, and in case you fall, I can just pull you up.*"*

*"*You sure?" *said Misha as she tightly held the railing "*It's better than your current 'option', for sure."
"Alright. Just make sure not to slip YOURSELF, otherwise we both will be done for." "Heh, just what do you even take me for?"
"Can't say that cuz of censorship."
"…Nvm, leave it. Now, gimme your hand."
The same hand, which used to break a full brick in a single punch, is now as soft as the petal of a flower-Strong, yet gentle. Siddhant made sure to keep Misha as close to himself as possible.
Meanwhile, Abhishek was coming behind them with the rest of his family.
He and Avantika were tightly holding onto their father's hand.
Soon, they all reached the waterfall. Siddhant released her hand when they reached the waterfall, and held it back again as they headed back to their cars.
Completely soaked, they reached their hotel in Amboli Village, ate their dinner, and went straight to bed. They were gonna explore 'the real' Amboli Ghat, early in the morning.
That 'welcome' in Amboli Ghat had raised everyone's expectations a few bars.

The next morning, they all went to their first stop of the day-Shri Hiranyakeshi Temple.

Maybe, coming here 'early' in the morning wasn't that great of an idea.
The temple opens by 6 A.M.,annnnd they reached it by 5. Even the sun was yet to come out. And here they were, waiting outside, in the cold, dark morning.
"You could've told us about the timing yesterday. What's the point of you coming here before, when you can't even remember such an important thing? Now, we somehow gotta pass an hour here."
"First of all, I came here BACK WHEN I WAS A KID! OFC I WON'T REMEMBER THE TIMING! And think of this as a new experience. Maybe, we can even camp here."
"In your dreams. Just go and bring that basket of flowers from your car. At least I can arrange some stuff before we enter the temple."
"Which one?"
"The one I gave you last night."
"Right, right.So, about that….I guess I KINDA forgot it back at the hotel"
sighs "No prob. Let's go back and get it, we've got time anyway."
"Huh? You're not angry with me? What the heck?"
"I was kind of expecting this anyway. And, I also have to go get some stuff I might need later. Now, let's hurry up, or we won't make it back in time."
Both of them went back to their hotel with Ronnie. Meanwhile, the rest of the crew was strolling around and busy clicking photos. All except ***one****.*

One who was so lost in the woods that, until the temple opened up, he didn't even budged from his spot.

The last ones to enter and the first ones to leave the temple were Siddhant and Misha.
Since Siddhant had already come here, he left early. And, also managed to sneak Misha out. Outside the temple, there's a kund, which contains something ***special****-*

*"*See, this is what I was talking about.*"*
*"*A fish?"
"Not just any fish. This little guy right here is one of the rarest fish in the world, found only in this kund."
*Recites from a nearby board "*Shri Schistura Hiranyakeshi Fish?"
"Yep. It translates to 'God's Fish'.It's cool, right?"
"For sure. Also, are we really allowed to go in? Ya, though I'd say let's not. This species is already on the verge of extinction. If people like us keep going in, then it won't be long before these lil' guys fully disappear."
"Makes sense.Though, there's one thing I just have to say now."
"It's not like you will stay quiet even if we tell ya to do so."
*Rolls her eyes "*Shut up.SO what I wanna say is that, you used to call Abhishek a nerd.*"*
*"*I still do.*"*

"But right now, to me, you seem more of a nerd than he is."
"That's cuz I've been here already. Ofc ik more than that, 'Mr. Wikipedia.'
That's the whole reason why I'm the tour guide here. As for Abhishek's situation, it's just a hunch, but ig there's another reason for that."
Confused "Huh? What is it? Did something happen to him?"
"Idk the details, but-"
"Just say it!"
"His behaviour's been kinda weird lately.
Like sometimes he's normal-laughing, shouting, etc. And suddenly, he goes completely silent. He usually tries to match me in eating. But now, it's as if he's just eating so his body can work. Almost as if it's a formality for him. His voice also seems down these days, maybe cuz he doesn't wanna talk. This morning, I even heard him talking to himself. He was murmuring, so of course I couldn't understand what he was saying.
All this just makes it seem as if, his 'spirit' is gone."
"I-"
Just as Misha was about to say something, their families came out as well-including Abhishek.
"I told you kids to stay with AT LEAST one adult. We have already 'lost' you people MULTIPLE times on this trip, no more of that. Go and sit in the cars, it's about time we head to our next location."

After Kartik's lecture, Siddhant and Misha went back to their cars. As for Abhishek, his body followed them at his own pace.

Their original plan was to head to a plateau nearby, when they encountered a few locals who told them about an even bigger and more beautiful plateau just a few miles ahead. Excited, they quickly headed in that direction. And after trekking for a few minutes, they were heavily rewarded for their efforts.

Standing on a far-stretched grassy terrain, with flowers of different colours, air as fresh as it could possibly get, and a mix of dark and white clouds up in the sky.A land known by few and loved by all.A place with no restrictions, no population, and no pollution.

The main attraction of that day was the shape of the sky. A full circle, with a mix of light and dark clouds, and hollow from inside. It had a shape similar to a donut. Among the pink, yellow, and White flowers, Siddhant and Misha carefully moved, making sure not a single flower got stomped. Soon enough, they found a good spot to sit.

*"*Come here! This one is a good spot! These rocks are big and smooth enough to work as seats.*"*
*Sits down "*What a great view!*"*
"Yeah. It's a bit similar to how it was back at the Tigers' point."

“Really?”
“Yep. Even these white flowers you see here are quite similar to that one flower I showed you at Lonavala lake.”
“Wish I could’ve joined y’all back then as well.”
“Me too. Though it’s alright. At least you are with us now. That’s what matters more.”

As the weather began to cool down, both laid down near those rocks, making sure not to ***crush any flower.*** *With the sky directly in front of their eyes, they began to gaze at as many clouds as they possibly could. They tried to compare them with whatever first crossed their minds.*

*“*Look! That one on your right, it looks just like a cupcake!
*“*Looks like Poo to me.”
glares at him “Shut up.”
“Take a look at that one, it looks just like Pluto.”
“The one under that cupcake cloud?”
“Yea, the one under that Poo-shaped cloud.”
gives him another glare
“My bad, my bad. That reminds me, where’s Abhishek?”
”I think he’s with Avantika, or maybe taking some photos with his parents.”
When these two began searching for Abhishek, they couldn’t find him. It was as if he had vanished into thin air.

“Did you find him?”
Huff “Not yet. I searched almost everywhere. The entire family is sitting together. Just where did this idiot go?!”
“Calm down. He must be somewhere around here. Let’s look for him again”
“Right!”
Just as these two were about to go looking for him again, a strong gale hit them from behind. It was strong enough to sweep away Misha’s hat. When they turned, they spotted Abhishek, standing at the edge of a cliff. To them, it appeared as if he was going to jump.
Both rushed in to get a hold of him. Though that wasn’t really the case. He was just admiring nature. Maybe trying to clear his head from what he’s been going through for some time now.

Siddhant has always hated the feeling of being alone. To him, even death would be much more of a more viable option, rather than being left out all alone. He’s someone who has a lot of friends, and he continues to make more and more, just to avoid that feeling of emptiness in his heart. Despite all that, sometimes, he still finds himself unable to ***connect*** *with anyone. He may very well be the definition of a* ***coconut.*** *Siddhant always manages to come out as the strongest person in the group.*
And yet, here he was, feeling ***inferior*** *to Abhishek, someone who isn’t even physically gifted, unlike him.*

Abhishek wasn't happy being alone. But to Siddhant, it appeared as if Abhishek could do the very thing Siddhant never could-being all by himself.

Before Siddhant and Misha could go and talk to Abhishek, Kartik called back all three of them. Once again, they lost their chance to talk to Abhishek. Though maybe they might have a shot at their next spot.

Baba Waterfall is no less than a hidden gem in the lush mountains of Amboli Valley. There's a huge cavity in a giant rock behind the waterfall, through which people pass by. It's generally the spot from which many tourists take cinematic shots of the waterfall. And the best thing about this waterfall? That's what this 'family' was about to discover in a few minutes.

Since the management didn't allow them to go near the waterfall by car, they had to do a trek for almost half a kilometer. The ground near the waterfall was quite slippery, thanks to the monsoon.

During a downhill, Misha lost her balance and fell because of the momentum.
Though this time, Siddhant actually managed to ***save*** *her.*
"Hah! Gotch! This time, I won't let go of you."

As they descended downwards, together, Siddhant held Misha's hand. And till the time they actually reached that rock, he didn't let go of her, not even once. Throughout this entire trek, Siddhant didn't apply any force, nor did he forcefully pull Misha towards himself. He just made sure that his grip was good enough that he could feel her hand's warmth, for as long as they were together.

When they finally reached the waterfall, Siddhant released Misha's hand and went near the edge of that rock to fully witness the 'best part' about that waterfall. When the sun's rays come in contact with the falling water, they create a beautiful rainbow. Such a beauty is the result of the combination of bright & warm sunlight, with the strong and cold water of Baba waterfall. The greenery around works as a fascinating background for this nature's masterwork.

They all decided to take a group photo from a bit closer to the waterfall. Except..there was a problem. None of them had brought a tripod, nor a selfie-stick. Just as Kartik was about to ask another tourist to click their picture, Abhishek suggested
"I can click the group photo."
"What about you? Without you, this won't be a group photo at all."
"It's alright. I've taken quite a lot of photos-including selfies, and even some cinematic shots. In this group,

I’m the best-suited guy for the role of a photographer.”
*Kartik agreed and gave his camera to Abhishek. He clicked some high-quality shots, impressing everyone. All except **one.** Siddhant was already suspicious of Abhishek. And now his suspicion grew even stronger. Why? Because ever since they got out of their cars, the only photo Abhishek has clicked is this group photo right here.*

Though for now, Siddhant decided not to confront him.
He wanted to see just what Abhishek would do next. Just how far will he go? How long will he continue with his ‘weird’ behaviour?
This whole time, Abhishek didn’t properly talk to Avantika, not even once. That raised Siddhant’s suspicion even higher.
Misha, on the other hand, was trying to keep things normal. But, deep down, even she had sensed that something weird was going on with Abhishek. But both Siddhant and Misha lacked any solid evidence to be able to confront Abhishek directly.

They still had two more places to go. After spending some more time at the nearby waterfalls, they left for their ‘second last’ point of the day.
Surrounded by a dark & dense forest, and almost in contact with the sky. The place which appears as the origin point of the clouds and, when gazed from its

edge, makes a whole new world appear, that is the Mahadevgad View Point. The interesting fact about this viewpoint is that, even with a blanket of fog during the monsoon, the view of the mountain range in front remains spectacular.

After going on treks for almost the entire day, they finally caught a break here. This is one of the places where the parking area is so close to the actual viewpoint. Ronnie and Siddhant decided to take some wide and cinematic shots with a drone they had recently bought from Lonavala-after they figured out how to actually use it.

“So this one is to go upwards?”
“No papa, that’s for tilting it backward.”
“What about this one?”
“That’s for going leftward, or maybe downwards. Idk for sure.”
“Just give me the manual, I’ll handle the rest.”
“Yea, right. So.., about that…I guess I KIND OF forgot it back at that tea stall when we were unboxing our drone.”
“…Seriously? *sigh* I wish I could also forget you at a tea stall that easily.”
“It’s alright, I can make this bad boy fly in just a minute.”
looks down on him “ Then exactly why haven’t you made this ‘bad boy’ fly for the past 15 minutes? ”
“I just wanted YOU to give it a shot.”

After several attempts, neither of them could make the drone fly properly. As they were about to give up on their cinematic shots, SOMEONE appeared-

“Huh? What are you doing here? Your parents are over there; you should go back to them. After packing this ‘mid drone’ up, we will come as we-”
“I know how to fly a drone. If you two want, I can take some pictures for you.”
Surprised “Seriously!? Beta, that’ll be a big help for us!”
hands over the drone and its controller to *“*Here, you are in charge now; just make sure not to crash it. Orrr.., I will complain to your brother.”
Puffs her face “I can fly it WAYY better than you, just watch!”

Avantika had taken a liking to drones back when she was just in elementary. To her, the concept of ‘flight’ is no less than magic. As soon as Siddhant gave her the controller, she wasted no time. She quickly turned on the drone, connected Ronnie’s phone with the controller, and before they all knew it, she launched her drone up in the sky. The drone flew so high that it matched the altitude of the clouds.
*“*Great work, beta! You are such a useful kid*,*
looks down on Siddhant unlike a certain SOMEONE.*”*
*With a wide smile, she replied: “*Thank you, uncle.”

*Probably this was the cue for Siddhant to **go back to the group.***

*While Avantika and Ronnie were busy recording some more sky shots,' everyone' else was enjoying the view from a less crowded spot. Since there are no restaurants in Mahadevgad, they had already bought some Maggi from a **tea stall** on their way up. Standing near the cliff's edge, a bit far from everyone, Siddhant and Misha were enjoying their 'evening snack'.*

"How is it that, despite being on a mountain almost every single day, this view just never feels old?"
"That's the beauty of nature. Maharashtra has been blessed with the mountains in the Sahyadri Range, running parallel to its 750 km long coastline."
"Life sure does feel different here."
"For real. Compared to city life, it's so much more peaceful here. As if"
"As if?"
"As if time has just stopped moving."
"That's for sur- *looks at Misha's plate* How about you try to match that pace?"
"Huh? Wdym?"
"You have already finished your Maggi. Meanwhile, I'm yet to take my first bite."
"I mean.., even the author can't resist it. So who am I to go slow?"
rolls his eyes "Yea, right. You want extras?"

“Without a doubt.”
“Gotch. I’ll be right back.”

*Soon enough, Siddhant returned with 3 bowls, full of Maggi. He gave one to Misha as she asked “*You going to eat 2 bowls or something?*”*
*“*Nope. This one is for that white flower.*”*
“Huh? Wdym?”
“Nothing. Just focus on your Maggi before it gets cold. I’ll be back soon.”
confused "Alright, I guess.”
Siddhant grabbed the other two bowls and left. He went to the complete opposite corner of where everyone was sitting.

“Here, take it.”
“Huh? Why are you here? You should go back and sit with the entire family.”
“Can’t call it family if one person is **missing.**”
Abhishek was quietly sitting in a corner, far from where everyone was. While others were spending time together, he was the only one who chose to stay alone, until Siddhant ***found*** *him.*
*“*Y’know, no matter how much you try to hide it, it’s quite obvious that something has happened to you.*”*
*“*That’s just your imagination; it’s all in your head. I’m being by myself just cuz I want to. There’s no ‘hidden meaning’ behind it.*”*
“Hmm.Y’know.”
“Huh?”

“You can fool the whole world, maybe even yourself. But, you can’t fool me.”
“True.Just like how you can’t paint an orange with orange color.”
“Yea rig- eh? What?”
“Nothing.”
“Nevermind ig. So, lemme ask you something.”
“It's not like you won’t ask even if I tell you not to.”
“Does your ‘problem’…have something to do with Misha?”
Abhishek froze for a second. He quickly got a hold of himself, got up, and said
“ Like I said, it has nothing to do with anyone. It’s all in your head. I’m going back to my car. It’s about to be sunset soon.”
“Alright then, I’ll see you at the‘final’ then. Just make sure to finish your Maggi.”
Judging by Abhishek’s expression, Siddhant somewhat managed to get an idea about his ‘problem’.

A few minutes later, they arrived at their next & ‘final’ location of the day.

After passing by a grassland, one with completely round bushes, spread across, as if that land were the ocean and those bushes were the fish, they witnessed ***the most beautiful sunset of their life.***

It was like a painting. With the Sun as its core and mountains at its sides. It appeared as if ***the mountains had paved a path for the Sun****. The valley below shone bright. Even though the Sun's light covered every corner,* ***its rays only fell where they were standing.*** *The clouds were thick enough to darken the sky, and yet hollow enough to let the Sunlight pierce through them. The whole ambience was so peaceful that their entire fatigue disappeared in thin air. The long day, which seemed like will go on forever, finally came to an end on the best note possible. Some even called it the 'Gateway to Heaven'.*

This time, something was different. Abhishek was with Avantika, watching over her in case she got too close to the edge. Avantika was busy flying a drone with Ronnie. She was in a world of her own. Just like her brother, who didn't talk to anyone until SOMEONE confronted him head-on as they were about to leave.

*"*What's your problem?*"*
confused "What did I do? I didn't even talk to anyone."
"That's the thing! Why haven't you talked to anyone? What's gotten into you?"
"First Siddhant and now you! I've already explained everything once, I'm not going to do it all again! Just go and ask Siddhant!"

“I want the answer from you only! We are your friends. You can talk to us about anything bothering you.”

turns away “Maybe I would’ve been better off WITHOUT any friend at all. At least then, I might’ve found some peace.”

Abhishek slowly started heading back to his car

“WHY YO-”

Siddhant came in front of Misha “Stop. At this rate, things will only get worse.”

“Get out of my way! I’ll knock some sense into him BY MY VERY OWN HANDS.”

“And? What will that do? You just saw how he isn’t answering any of your questions. Just now, if I hadn’t stepped in between you and him, a fight would’ve broken out for sure. If you still think your way can fix him, then go. I won’t stop you.”

Frustrated on herself-disappointed and helpless, Misha asked him

“So what can we even do to bring him back to his normal self?”

“For now, let’s just wait. We need to figure out the exact reason first. Without knowing about it, we can’t possibly do anything. It’s getting dark now, let’s go back to our cars.”

All of them quickly regrouped and, after a long day, finally went back to their hotel.

*Today was a memorable day for sure. With many good memories, and a **bad** one, their day finally came to an end-or not. At least not yet.*

A few hours after dinner, they grabbed their equipment-torches, mosquito repellent, and a few more things to get by- and headed into the foggy forest at midnight. The night jungle walk is one of the 'must-do' activities in Amboli. Exploring the same forest, which appeared so good during the day, is now nothing less than a labyrinth. The forest was full of various rare species. After walking for barely a kilometer, they encountered some rare species, one such being a baby Olive Forest Snake.

Carefully walking across the jungle, their every step led them to a new kind of bug or an animal they had never seen before . There was a lot to cover. Blue snails, red & black coloured bugs, spiders of different sizes, and many more, all being part of a single ecosystem.
What was the main attraction of the night? That mushy fungus, which grew on the stem of some plants, glowed into neon green colour as the sky got pitch black. With the moon's light slowly disappearing, they all started heading back to the hotel. Siddhant was a bit behind the rest of the crew, busy tying his shoelaces. When he finally began walking forward, he saw something on the road-

*"*Hm? What's this*?"*
*Kneels down "*HUH!? BLOOD*!?"*
Confused and scared, Siddhant dared to look forward, the same way his family was heading to. And to his nightmare, they were followed by a trail of drops of blood. As he began following the traces of blood, he noticed something. The trail only went straight for a few meters,and then took a curve into the forest. Another thing to notice was that one of the family members was missing.And since Siddhant was the last one coming behind, it couldn't have been possible for anyone to be left behind. The trail went near a tree with a thick trunk. When Siddhant took a peek behind it, he saw SOMEONE-

With his feet and ankles covered by leeches, blood was slowly dripping out of his body. Abhishek, with blood covering the ground around him, had gone completely silent. Letting out a scream for help was a far cry from him. Meanwhile, watching from afar, Siddhant was in complete shock. He remembered how he was screaming, crying from pain, when he had to pull out a single leech from his leg. And here was Abhishek, completely expressionless. It was almost as if he couldn't feel any pain at all.

In his childhood, people always used to make fun of Siddhant. The sole reason is his weight. Ever since his birth, Siddhant was always the chubby kid in the room. No matter where he went or who he met with,

every single time, he was harassed for being overweight. A turning point came in his life when his parents made him join a gym, back when he was just 10 years old. Through sheer will, he consistently continued to work on himself until he finally started seeing some progress. As he grew up, he started participating in more and more physical activities, trying stuff he had never done, doing things he never could've imagined would be possible for him one day. All this is what led him into callisthenics. Even for someone born with heavenly gifted strength, such a transformation couldn't have been possible without pushing himself to his very limits. One takeaway from Sidhhant's life has to be his favourite line of all time: ' Talent is something you make bloom. Instinct is something you polish.'

Yet, it's just as they say. Life hits you the hardest when you least expect it. After removing all the leeches off himself, Abhishek opened up his backpack and brought out two items: a towel,and his pajamas. He quickly wiped off all the blood from his legs and then switched from his shorts into his pajamas. Soon enough, Abhishek ran back to his car. He planned to go back to his room and patch himself up there only, without anyone finding out about it. Siddhant, stunned by witnessing Abhishek's endurance, also followed him back to the hotel. To him, one thing was clear-whatever had happened to Abhishek,won't come off easily. Just like those leeches.

After turning the lights off, all of them laid on their beds, as they tried to get as much sleep as they possibly could in what little time they had left, before the Sun illuminated the sky again.
Completely tired out, everyone fell asleep. ***All except one.****Siddhant, who was still in shock from what he saw behind that tree.*

We Humans Think That The Hardest Thing To Do Is To Do Everything By Ourselves. However, Sometimes The ACTUAL Hardest Thing To Do Is To Ask For Help-Especially During Those Times When You Think That You Just Have To Handle It All By Yourself.

Chapter-6 "The Depths IN Konkana"

Chapter-6

“The Depths IN Konkana”

We Humans Firmly Believe That Making Mistakes Is Wrong. But In Reality, Not Accepting It, And Never Trying To Fix It, IS the Wrong Deed. Acceptance Of Wrong Is The Only Way For One To Fix It.

With the Arabian Sea to its left and the Karli River flowing to its right, over the golden sand of Devbag Beach and at the Devbag Delta Point, the Rivercoast resort has served as the second home for any tourist visiting Konkan. Be it the finger-licking Malvani food, classic wooden cottages, or the view of Karli river from the resort-the peaceful ambience of this place offers it all. Though at the very moment, it’s anything but ‘peaceful.’

“WHERE’S MY BAG!?”
“I DON’T KNOW! GO ASK YOUR MOTHER! I’VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR MY WALLET FOR THE PAST 20 MINUTES. IT'S NOT EVEN IN MY POCKET!”
“Mummy, where’s my charger??”
“You gave it to Misha last night, remember?”

dashes towards the door “I’ll be back soon! Just put my socks under that blue jacket and make sure to close the suitcase up properly.”
knocks on the door “C’mon, hurry up!” *Opens the door*
“What are you doing here? And why are you in the same clothes you were wearing last night? We are already getting late, go and get ready!”
“Lemme speak now, will ya!? You still have my charger. Give it back, my phone’s about to die!”
“Huh? I gave it to you last night. Go check your orange backpa-
Memories from last night kicked in. Siddhant suddenly ran off back to his room without saying a single word.
Make sure you get ready fast, it’s almost noon.”

After the Night Jungle Walk, they all went to bed just a few hours before their departure time. And since the Sun was about to come out soon anyway, they all decided to pack up their stuff in what little time they had left-except for Siddhant, who wasted no time falling asleep. They left by 4 and reached their resort before 7 a.m. Instead of going for breakfast, they all decided to take a nap. The plan was to wake up by 10, freshen up, and then head to the first location of the day-AFTER having some breakfast, of course. But thanks to Siddhant, by the time they all left, it had gotten a little over noon.

“There are two ways of reaching this ‘Mini Kerala ’- via a rented scooter or boat. Which one are we going for? I’d say let’s go with scooters. Driving on this open road will be fun. And eve-”
“Not a chance. We are going by boat. Driving sure is fun, but since we’ve got such a big crew here, renting scooters is going to be both risky and expensive.
Glares at Siddhant Plus, you are underage, Siddhant. No way I’m letting you drive before you turn 18.”
looks down “Right, papa.”
“All right, everyone, gather up! We are about to leave.”

After spending some time surrounded by the huge and curved coconut trees, they returned to their resort and left for the place where they were going to spend the rest of their day.

Under the Sun’s hot blaze in the afternoon, they trekked over a huge cliff and reached the Nivati fort. Though most of the fort has been destroyed, one thing remains the same as back when it was built-the high ground view of Nivati beach.

Stretches his arms wide “Hmm! What a view! The white sand covering the entire beach, the crystal-clear water reflecting sunlight, and this fast and fresh wind. From up here, this panoramic view is krazy.”

“How about you quit with your T-pose and come down first? Also, weren’t you the one complaining about how we have to trek almost everywhere?”
jumps down “You won’t get it. Visiting these kinds of places is good enough to lift up one's spirit. How unfortunate, that short people like you can’t even have such experiences.
I pity yo-” *pushes him*
*“*WOAHH*!*
gets a hold of himself YOU OUTTA YOUR MIND OR SOMETHING?? WHAT WOULD’VE HAPPENEN IF I HAD FALLEN OFF!*?”*
*“*My bad. I thought ‘tall people’ like you can't experience pain. Maybe your spirits weren’t high enough, after all?*”*
*Angry “*Why yo-*”*
*turns away “*All right lets head down. We still have to go to that beach and the Nivati lagoon. I’ll see you there. Just make sure not to ‘fall off’.Bye!”
Chases after her “Wait for me!”

A great thing about the Nivati beach is that, unlike other Goan beaches, no heavy crowd comes here- which is the main reason why it has managed to stay clean for so long. After changing their clothes, Siddhant and Misha went near the ocean while the rest of the family separated into different small groups to explore in their own ways.

“How about you stop swimming for a second and help me build this sand castle. This is a bit too much manual labour for one person.”
“You mean you want me to come out of this cold water, IN THAT INFERNO, just to help you build an architectural disaster which will be swept away with a single tide?”
“I guess, ye-”
“NO! I'm not coming out anytime soon. How about you coming in for a swim?”
“Y’know, we can swim later. Ratnagiri has a lot of beaches as well. This beach looks like a good spot to build my masterpiece!”
Mumbles “In your Dreams”
“What did you just say!?”
“Nothing.
Let’s go back to the group. We still have to go to some more places. And with time passing by so fast, we should hurry up.”
“Alright I guess. Maybe someone will complete this sand castle one day, and fulfill my legacy!”
“Not in a millennium.” *throws her slipper at him*
*“*I heard that!*”*
*runs off “*Catch ya later!*”*

The Nivati lagoon is where the seawater is confined into large, quiet pools along the shore. Water activities such as Kayaking on these clear and transparent waters are what Misha, Avantika, Siddhant, and his family went for. The rest of the

crew decided to keep exploring the beach while also making sure not to throw any waste nearby. When we see a clean place, our first instinct is to try not to make it dirty. Though the exact opposite is what we do when the place itself is already thrashed up. It's basic psychology. Avantika was the most excited one for Kayaking because of two reasons-it was her first time trying it, and unlike last time, the waters here aren't as deep. That's the sole reason why her parents agreed to let her do it. As for her brother, let's just say he was busy 'relaxing',i.e, strolling in nature.

Since their final spot for the day was nearby, everyone took their time at the beach. And just before the sun began to set, they all regrouped near the 'Golden rocks' of Nivati beach.

"The rock formations are called Golden Rocks because of the unique mineral composition that causes them to reflect a striking, brilliant gold color when hit by sunlight, especially during sunrise and sunset."
"Searched it up, right?"
"Had to. We don't have our 'GPS anymore."
"It's about to be sunset, let's go on it."
"Just gimme a min. Lemme switch to my sandals. Also, make sure to hold my hand. These rocks are sharp as hell. Just climbing them in is very hard. You make one wrong move here, and it's all over."

“Alright alright. You could’ve told me before, though. I would’ve bought a pair of sandals for myself as well.”
“I also just learnt about this myself.”
“Huh? Then why do you have your sandals with you right now?”
“I always carry them with me. Who knows when I might need ‘em?”
sighs “Can’t argue with you.”

Siddhant slowly led both-himself and Misha to the top of those rocks, with Ronnie and Kartik just behind them.
Rock crumbles “Walk a bit carefully! At this rate, you’ll make both of us fall.”
“Not my fault. I have to watch both mine AND your steps.”
“It’s not easy walking on such sharp rocks, y’know! These slippers are doing absolutely nothi- *lands on a sharp rock* “Oww! This sucks! It's the 3rd time I’ve hit one of these spikes. It’s almost as if I’m walking on a huge porcupine!”
“Bruh.Alright here.
gives his sandals to her Now gimme your slippers and stop complaining.”
“What about you? Won’t you get hurt?”
“As long as you don’t get hurt, I’ll be fine…..Also, getting spiked by a rock is much better than you shouting in my ears.”
“Shut up.

Hands over her slippers Here. Just be careful, ok?"
Sighs "Yes, Ma'am. Now, shall we go on ahead?"
"Lead the way."

Slowly trekking his way up, Siddhant was the first to reach the top. Then, he made sure to get a good grip, and carefully pulled up Misha. Kartik and Ronnie couldn't reach the top and decided to enjoy the sunset from a bit below those two. After clicking a few selfies from the top, Kartik helped Misha get down. As for Siddhant, he ***jumped*** *his way down. With the day slowly coming to an end, they all returned to their resort. Just as Misha and Siddhant were about to head inside, SOMEONE called them from behind-*

"Hold up, you two." *Both turns back*
*"*Huh? Abhishek?*"*
*"*What is it?"
"There's something I wanna talk to you two about."
"After all this time? Why not before?"
"Just leave it, Misha. You just say what you dude. We're all ears."
takes a deep breath "I want to apologize to you two. I'm sorry for b-"
"For what? WHAT ARE YOU SORRY FOR EXACTLY!?"
"Misha chillo-"

“YOU SHUT UP! And you? Tell me what exactly you are sorry for? And even before that, what do YOU MEAN by sorry?
Do you have any idea how much sick worried everyone has been about you? After Lonavala, I have not seen a single person in our group smile the way they used to. And leave us for a second. What about Avantika? What did SHE do? You haven’t even properly talked to her for the past few days. She has been hanging around with us even more than she used to. Y’know why?
Cuz her OWN BROTHER won’t even bother spending some time with her! Back in Amboli, we went to so many great places. Everyone seemed so happy. Even here, we’re having as much fun as we can. And yet, something feels missing. Y’know what that is?”
“That we’re not able to spend enough time in a single place?”
“IT'S YOU, DUMBO! Ever since you started zoning out, this family of ours has started feeling hollow. We all miss you yapping about any place we go to. It has been so long since you and Siddhant last did any of your shenanigans.
Today, None of us heard your voice, not even once. Not until you decided to come up to us, thinking that just saying sorry would fix everything.
To us, you are a part of our family, and a family can never be complete if even a single person is missing.

Turns away but maybe all this doesn't even matter to you. You don't even consider us your friend, so why even bother apologizing to us?
Frustrated Argh! I'm leaving. You can go and apologize to 'yourself!'
Walks away. I'm out!"
"Misha, listen!"
"She's gone now. You lost her on this one.
Listen, I know you must've had your reasons for your actions. But that doesn't matter. What you did was wrong. I won't say much. Misha has already said a lot.
Comes closer to Abhishek I have known you long enough to be able to tell that you yourself aren't happy with what you did.
Siddhant puts his hand on Abhishek's shoulder and I also know that you will figure your way out of this, just like you always do. After all, you are my rival. And my rival can never be weak.
Never.
I'll see ya tomorrow. Till then, peace.

As Siddhant began walking back to the resort, Abhishek told him one thing-

*"*Can you come to the Devbagh beach tomorrow, by 5 A.M*?* And also bring Misha with you." *Siddhant smiled and replied* "If that's what you wish for, then sure*."*

*Both of them called it a night. Everyone was sleeping peacefully****. Everyone except one.*** *Misha, with her blanket over her head, was regretting what she had said to Abhishek. Her harsh words seemed to have hurt not only Abhishek, but herself as well. Still, somehow she also fell asleep after a few hours.*

The next morning

With the Moon still in the sky, and the wall clock hitting the 5 A.M mark, only a handful of sounds could be heard. Sounds like the sound of birds chirping, the sound of the ocean's tides, even the sound of Kartik's snoring. But among them all, one noise stood out the most-the sound of Misha's ringtone. With her phone right by her side, she woke up immediately after her phone rang.

Yawns "Who even is this? Calling someone so early in the morning, what a shameless person! *Looks at her phone* Huh? Siddhant? Why is he calling me AT THIS HOUR?
Picks up the call "Hello?"
"Took ya long enough. What were you even doing to have picked up my call this late?"
"The same thing any sane person would be doing right now." "Playing UNO?"
Ragebaited "WITH WHO!? YOUR GHOST?"
"My bad, my bad. Chill out."

“Why are you even calling me so early in the morning? You good?”
“Kind of yea. Though it’s just as you said. I’m in a bit of a drench, and only you are the one who can help me out.”
Confused “What do you mean? Did you hurt yourself or something?”
“Even worse.Though I can’t tell ya what it is on the call. You have to come and meet me outside.” “Just spit it out.”
“I’ll explain everything once you come to the beach. I’ll see ya there only.”
“Wait! I haven’t even washed my face yet.”
Whispers “Not like doing so will change a thing.”
“WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY!?”
“Nothing, nothing. Anyways, just hurry up and come. I’ll be waiting for ya.”
“Fine. But, you’ll have to explain everything to me properly.”
“Of course, you bird-brain.”
“YOU SAID WH-”
*hangs up the call “*Phew! Barely made it outta lion’s den.
Now, just gotta wait for the ‘Grand master.’ ”

Misha silently left her room and made it out of the resort, without waking up anyone. When she reached the beach, she saw Siddhant lying on the beach’s shore. Since he wasn’t even moving an inch, Misha got scared and ran towards him as fast as she

possibly could. When she finally reached him, she saw that Siddhant was-

*"*Sleeping? Right now? AND RIGHT HERE!?
Stomps him in his guts WAKE UP!"
Instantly gets up "Owwwch!! You outta your mind or something!? What's wrong with ya!??" "What's wrong with ME? YOU TELL ME WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU!? Who even falls asleep in such a place!?"
"Uh. Well, I thought you were gonna take your sweet time coming here, so I thought, why not lie down and enjoy this peaceful morning? And before I knew it, I fell asleep. And the night thing I knew was how you almost PIERCED through my stomach!"
"Ugh, leave it. Why did you even call me so early in the morning?"
"To be honest, I'm not the one who called you."
confused "Huh? Then who did?"
"I did."
Both turn back

With an apologetic look on his face and holding three popsicles in his hands, Abhishek slowly approached them. Misha, not knowing how to respond to this situation, started heading back when-

*Siddhant grabbed her arm and said "*Just how long do you plan to keep running away? For as long as I can remember, you've never been like this.

You've always been the one to tackle things head-on, no matter what! So why back off now?
All three of us know very well that you couldn't even sleep properly last night. And the reason is obvious, i t's cuz of what you said to Abhishek last night.
The solemn reason why you can't face him right now is because of the way you talked to him last night.
But…what about him? What about Abhishek? Doesn't he also feel bad for his behaviour? It's not like he's some noble soul, or some kinda superhuman who won't feel a thing. He's also feeling bad for his actions. He also wants to run away. And yet, here he is, trying his best to face us. He's here cuz he's brave enough to face the consequences for his actions. He knows it well that no matter what happens, he can always come back to us. HE'S HERE CUZ HE'S OUR FRIEND!
Looks at Abhishek As much as I hate to admit it, right now, the strongest person here is Abhishek.
Turns back to Misha But what about you? You are one of us, right? You said that a family can't be complete if even a single person is missing.
Leaves her hand, Y'know, the missing person is finally coming back.
Joins his hands Now, please don't make another family member go 'missing'."

Once again, the Kotodama of Siddhant managed to reach its peak, the sole reason being, his emotions managed to reach their PEAK as well. His words

were harsh, yet calm at the same time. Words strong enough to have broken the personal dilemma of Misha. She took a deep breath, looked at Abhishek, and said-

*"*Fine, I'll give you a chance. But make sure to wrap it up fast. Also, are you even going to hand over those popsicles, or let them melt away?"

Abhishek smiled as he handed over a popsicle to each of them.

"Let's all sit down." "Something like a picnic typa thing?"

*Abhishek smiled "*Yep. You can say that.*"*

As they sat down and started eating their popsicles, Abhishek began narrating his story-

"It's pretty much how you people guessed it. Things did start going downhill after Lonavala. For me, it all happened when Misha fell as we were climbing the Lohagad fort.

Siddhant side-eyed Misha as she turned her away, trying to dodge his gaze ''That's it? You did allat just cuz this dumb nut got herself injured? LOL."

"Shut up.

Looks at Abhishek Though, he is correct. You completely isolating yourself just cuz I sprained my ankle doesn't make any sense to me. Like, it was just an accident. Such things are bound to happen."

"Yea!. Plus, we've already done so much for her. It's nothing new. Remember that one time when we were playing volleyball in school? She was on the opposite

team. I was in the flow and didn’t bother thinking twice. As soon as I saw the ball coming my way, I jumped and spiked as hard as I could. And my god, what a spike that was! That sound, that feeling, Mmm! I can still feel that sensation in my hand.”
“ Yea and I was the one who had to pay for that ‘sensation’, WITH MY FACE!”
“I mean, it was worth it for sure. And it's not like you didn’t beat the hell outta me afterwards.” *Abhishek stopped their quarrel and explained the ‘actual’ reason* “That's not all. The real reason is a bit different.
It’s about my brother.
Back when I was 10, my family had planned a trip to a hill station. Since it was during summer vacation, my cousin brother also decided to tag along. On the day of the climb, it rained heavily during the morning. Though the weather did manage to clear up, the ground was still pretty muddy. We were happily trekking our way up when-”

‘You should let me walk by the edge as well.”
“Nope, that’s for adults. Kids like you should stay close to the other side.”
“Aww,c’mon! Y’know, the view from here is soo good. I wanna click some pictures, capturing it to its fullest.”
“Maybe next time, when you grow up a little more. For now, just take some shots of the other side.”
“Fine.”

“While I was busy taking photographs of some birds nearby, my brother, who was with me a moment ago, vanished. I had no idea where he went. When I looked back, I saw my parents-horrified, screaming his name as they looked downward. I had no idea what was going on. When we finally made it back to the bottom, I saw a huge crowd standing in a full circle.

At the center of it was my brother’s body.

Misha gasped, while Siddhant had gone completely silent.

He understood that it was a case of PTSD. This perfectly explained why Abhishek carried the same horrified look as his parents did back then. Misha’s fall must’ve acted as a trigger for Abhishek.

What I wanted to capture was a different view than the one I got.

Barely manages to hold himself together. Anyways, I guess that should be enough of an explanation. Though there’s one more thing I want to say.

“Sure, go on bud.”

“Since I couldn’t properly apologize last night, lemme do so now.

Bows down, I’m sorry. I really shouldn’t have said what I did back then. If only I hadn’t given up on you two, maybe things would’ve turned out a bit different. I -”

“Get up, dude, that’s enough."

“Yeah. We understand how you feel. It must’ve been hard on you. And it's kind of our fault as well. Maybe things wouldn’t have escalated this much if we had just talked to you about it. We are sorry as well.”
“It’s alright. I guess we all make mistakes somewhere.”
“Yep.Except for me ofc. After all, it’s all cuz of me that things are finally back to normal now. I know I’m the best!”
Abhishek and Misha looked at each other and started laughing “Yea right. Wish your height was as high as your confidence.”
"At least I don’t isolate myself just to ‘enjoy’ the ambience.”
“Still better than crying like a baby just cuz one leech bit ya.”
“I wasn’t crying."
“ Yes, you were.”
“Nope”
“Yep”
“No”
“Yes”
“Nev-”
“Alright, chill out, you two. It’s all over. Let’s head back now.”
“Fine.”
"Ay, y'know what they say- All’s well that ends well.”
“I guess, yeah.”
“Let’s race back. The last one to come will have to pay for everyone’s breakfast.”

“Sounds good.”
“Alright,3..2..1..GO!”
Both ran off, leaving Misha in the dust as she ran after them
“ Wait for me, you dumbos!”

The Sunrise not only meant the start of a new day, but also the end of something ‘trivial’.Something which could’ve evolved into a much more crucial matter if it had escalated any further.Though, for now, it all ended on a good note. But the day is still far from over.
Today’s plan was to go for Flyboarding first. Though there was a ‘little’ problem. Generally, during the monsoon season, almost all water activities in Konkan are suspended till August. So with Flyboarding out of the way, they ate their lunch early and by 2 P.M, made it to the MTDC’S IISDA (Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation’s Indian Institute of Scuba Diving & Aquatic Sports).

For their 3rd day here, their plan was to do Scuba diving, visit some old lighthouses, and hopefully leave early for their ***final destination*** *in Maharashtra.*

Their Scuba diving session at IISDA went on till evening. After everyone finally understood the basics and got the hang of being underwater, they all went back to their resort to get some rest. The day ended with all the packaging and preparations done for

tomorrow. The next day, they all loaded their stuff into their cars and left for the Malvan beach a bit early in the morning.

“Hurry up, you slowpoke! The ferry’s ‘bouta leave!”
“Almost there! Just hold on for a min!”
By 8, they had reached the Malvan beach. From there, they took a public ferry and went to-
“This Sindhudurg Fort. Built in the 17th century by the Father of the Indian Navy-Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, this architectural marvel was designed to counter the rising naval presence of European colonial powers. Located on a rocky island off the Malvan coast of Maharashtra, it remains a symbol of Maratha maritime supremacy. Th-”
Claps “Waow!”
“?”
“It feels sooo good having our GPS back, I could potentially cry a bucket right now.”
“How about saving that for some other time? I’m sure there will come plenty of times for ya to do so.”
“Yep, Abhishek is correct. And if they don’t come, then I’ll make sure to bring some in for your sake.”
A bit annoyed “Huh? Wdym?”
“Nothing. Never mind that one.
Turns to Abhishek Abhishek, you may proceed.”
“Thank you, your honour.
Clears his throat. So, like I was saying, this little shrine right here is one of the key attractions of this island.”

“Why? It looks quite normal from the outside.”
“Cuz this shrine contains the real handprint of Ch. Shivaji Maharaj’s right hand, and the footprint of his left foot.”
“Dayum, though it's quite worn out.”
“That must’ve happened with the passage of time. It can’t stay in its original condition forever.”
“You are kind of right, Misha. Though that's just not it. Many tourists compare their hand and footprint with theirs, resulting in their current condition.”
“That’s so bad….So where are we heading next?”
glares at him “At least have some sympathy!”
“My bad, my bad.”
“Anyways, next up is the Maa Bhavani temple. Then, the beardless idol of Ch. Shivaji Maharaj-where his famous **Tulja Firang** Sword is located. And finally, we will cover some of the booby traps here-both from inside and outside.”
“I guess then we should hurry up, cuz the whole family has already gone inside. We are the only ones left.”
“Huh? When did th-”
Misha grabs his arm “ We can save all that for later, let's just go!”

After spending a few hours sightseeing the sharp cut corners, hot oil droppers above the entrance gates, treacherous natural rocks which used to force powerful Arabian Sea tides and enemy ships to crash and splinter, and many more traps in the defense

system of this fort, they headed back to the Malvan beach and went to their rented boat which took them from the Karli river to their diving spot-Nivati light house,that's13 kilometres into the Arabian Sea.

In the cold and clear waters of the Konkan coast, two young men headed straight downwards. To anyone far away, it appeared as if they were drowning. They went as deep as they possibly could, till their feet finally touched the land. On the surface of that land, grew hundreds-if not thousands, of aquatic plants. Different in shape, size & colour, and yet, all co-existed as a part of the same ecosystem. While some fish used it as their home, others camouflaged with them to dodge their hunters.

*As they were trying to find a sweet spot to click some pictures, something rather interesting caught their eyes.**A phenomenon unique to the ocean itself.** Surrounded by a swarm of reef fish, a girl stood above them. Fishes such as the Damselfish (Yellowtail and Blue-green varieties), Butterflyfish, and even Wrasses, all were swirling around her. To the boys, it appeared no less than a whirlpool of fish, with their queen as its core. The terrain around her was full of Favia, Orange cup, and Plate & Scroll Corals, along with massive porites growing on the floor. With the Sun as her halo, and her hands spread wide, she appeared no less than a fairy herself. Mesmerised, the boys couldn't help but admire the*

beautiful sight in front of them. When they finally got out of the water, the only photo they had captured was of that oceanic miracle.

“Vengurla Nivti lighthouses. The first one is the old one, built during the Portuguese Era, and the second one is the new one, built during the British Era. Both of them look pretty cool during the sunset.”
“So are we gonna check ‘em out?”
“Nah, too late for that one. We are going back to the beach right now. Any more delay and we won’t make it **there** before nighttime.”

This time, before the Sun disappeared from the sky, the entire crew changed back to their normal clothing, cross-checked their stuff, and with God by their side, they headed to the place where their journey would come to an ‘end’.

We Humans Always Have The Choice Of Living In The Past. The Only Difference Being That It Can Never Be The Same As The One We Know. Why? Because When Trying To Relive A Moment, The Only One We Will Ever Find There Is Ourself.

Chapter-7 "Ratnagiri:The Hidden Gem Of Monsoon""

Chapter-7

“Ratnagiri: The Hidden Gem Of Monsoon”

We Humans Treat Kindness As If It's Some Kind Of Luxury. It Might Seem Like Even A Simple Act Of Kindness Takes A Lot Of Efforts, And Sometimes, Can Get a Little Expensive. But In The End, As Long As It Makes Us Happy, It’s All Worth It.

“Now that we've finally made it here, what’s next? We gonna explore any place today? There’s still some time left.”
“Not today, Son. It’s past 8 P.M.Let’s have dinner and get some rest for the night.”
Abhishek walks in “Uncle’s right. Tomorrow’s gonna be a long day anyway, let’s just get some rest while we still can.”
“Not in the mood. To be honest, I feel like staying up all night.”
“Then I’ve got the perfect job for ya.
Hands over his camera to Siddhant Sort out all the photos in this camera, into your laptop. And make a folder for each location we went to. That should be good enough to keep you occupied for the whole night.”

turns back to the hotel “Alright, I'm going back into the hotel
walks away Cya later folks!”

The crew made it to Ratnagiri a few hours after they had left Malwan. After dinner, instead of heading to bed, they all gathered up in Abhishek’s room to review all the photos and some other stuff they had gathered up throughout their trip.

“This rock is from Nashik, right?”
Siddhant slides in “Yep. It was supposed to be a souvenir tho. But I guess giving it to you here was the right choice.”
“That’s for real. Otherwise, he would've broken it on the way back.”
“No, I wouldn’t”
“Oh, really? Mind telling me about the person who almost LOST our camera while scuba diving?” *Gulps*
“Must’ve been the wind.”
Looks down on him “Underwater? Yeah, right.”
Misha stops them “Anyways, how about the photos from Tapola? Do we have some shots of us Kayaking?”
“ Don’t think so. Abhishek and I were busy racing. Also, we didn’t take the camera with us there. I’m sure I left it back in my room before we left.”
“Still, we’ve got plenty of photos from Tapola.”
Kartik walks in “If you kids are done chatting, then head to your beds.”

“Alright, uncle. I’m off y'all. G-”
“Hold up! I don’t have many shots from Lonavala, especially after Lohagad Fort. Dm me some later, alright?”
“Gotcha! *High fives Abhishek and Misha* Goodnight gang!”
Yawns “Goodnight”
Abhishek gets up “ ‘Night.”

Everyone packed their stuff for the next day, charged their phones-including a certain SOMEONE, and tired from all the travel today, fell asleep like a baby. Though travelling this much, and getting enough sleep, EVERY DAY is hard for them, no one in their family seems to be having a problem with it. Instead, every single one of them has the excitement of exploring a new place every day. This trip has given them a lot of experiences, helped them face their own personal challenges, and grow both individually AND together. But the story is far from being over!

The next morning, they all went to see a sea fort situated on the famous sea shore of Ratnagiri-The Ratnadurga Fort.

Surrounded by the turquoise blue water of the Arabian Sea from all three directions, the horseshoe-shaped layout of the fort offers breathtaking 360-degree views of the coastline. Down the cliff is a huge sea cave. Since it's on the shore, half of the cave is

always filled with water. An echo in this pitch-black cave can make the reverberations feel like the sound's coming from near your ear. Visiting such a place during the nighttime can be no less than a nightmare. On their way back, Siddhant spotted something- "Look!" Not far from the fort stood a tall statue. That statue had the same colour as the soil in Ratnagiri. Facing the tides of the ocean was the statue of the legendary Maratha King-Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

Just as they were about to leave, the weather suddenly changed. The clear blue sky from 2 minutes ago was now filled with thunderous clouds. Downpour from the stormy rain made the view even more cinematic. Walking by these west-facing cliffs in such weather truly makes the morning a peaceful experience and helps calm the mind-as long as one has a raincoat.

A few minutes after they all dried up, the crew left for a 'small stature & yet high significance' place.'Located on the banks of a small river is a small Shiv temple. From the entry gate, there's a path that leads to this temple. Rich rice fields and dense forests are spread far and wide on both sides. With the music of birds echoing in every corner of the forest amidst the lush green fields, walking through the path in the middle feels as if nature itself is welcoming you. After travelling for more than 20 km

away from the main city, the crew arrived at their destination.

“Don’t fall off the stairs.”
*“*Easy for you to say. Thanks to the rain, the whole staircase is slippery now.*”*
*“*Stop complaining. Even Avantika and I are going on without slipping.”
“See, if the girls can do it, then why can’t you? Just man up.”
“You just do your duty, Mr. No-way home. I’ll manage somehow.”
"Alright, alright.So, the temple’s situated on this huge, slightly-round shaped rock.And since the rock’s shape is like a water pot, the temple’s known as Shree LOTESHWAR Shiv Mandir. This spot isn't very famous, hence the low crowd.”
“The whole temple built on a single rock? This rock’s gotta be strong.”
“Go check it out if you want, we’re leaving anyway.”
Abhishek walks away “See ya later, Siddhant.”
Misha waves him off “Hold up. Wait for me!”

As they were on their way to the next location, Madhav spotted something HUGE on his right side-

“Look at that, you two!”
“Hm? A viaduct? We’ve seen so many of them already.”

“Not this one. This engineering marvel, on the Konkan Railway, is known as the Panval Setu Viaduct. After leaving Ratnagiri station, within a few minutes, the train passes through this magnificent bridge. Built back in 1994, this bridge was the highest railway viaduct in the whole of Asia and, more than 200 feet high, is the tallest in India. The view of these dense forests from that high is great! You kids would’ve understood it all much better if you could’ve been on it once.” “Road trips are better though, right?”
“Well, they sure do get a bit expensive & take more time. But, compared to how much you get to enjoy, I’d say they are worth it.”
“Papa, how about you shift your focus from that bridge to the road? We can go there by train some other day, if we don’t die from a road accident.”
“Right, my bad.
Increases the car’s speed Buckle up kids. We will reach our destination before time!”

Inspired by this incident, their next destination takes place near a viaduct. A waterfall right in front of which the Konkan Railway passes through a viaduct bridge.The favourite spot of Abhishek’s father, where he used to come back when he was young-Ranpat Waterfall.

*"*This is practically in the middle of nowhere. And now we have to do a 10-minute trek? Papa, you sure this place will be worth it?*"*
grabs his bag "I don't know. But Abhishek's father did said that this is a good spot, so let's have some faith in him. Plus, we are here to explore anyway. Let's get going."

When they reached the bottom, in front of them were three waterfalls-originated from a single water stream, which was divided into three parts due to the terrain. Rocks on the ground were broken down into shards by the water's pressure. And the ones who managed to survive constantly continued to lose their shape. While others were busy getting closer to the waterfall, Misha noticed a board which read-

"Beware of flash floods.
Looks at Abhishek's father Uncle, is this place really safe?"
"Since this place is completely isolated, it becomes impossible to get help here in times of emergency. On top of that, the water flow can also increase due to the monsoon season. And that's what makes it fun! You can never know when life will hit you hard."
Scared "I guess I'll observe the view from behind. Someone needs to stack back to click pictures anywa-"

*Before Misha could finish, a loud roar came from above. The heavy rainfall resulted in an increase in the sudden overflow. As water started coming, crashing down from above, everyone ran back. Everyone but **two.** Abhishek and Siddhant were standing as close to the waterfall as they possibly could.*

*"*Are you two out of your mind!? Come back here! We won't even find any hospital nearby.*"*

*"*No need for that. This much waterflow is nothing.*"*

*"*Yep. We can even try sitting under this waterfall. *Looks at Abhishek* You down?*"*

"Always.In 3…. 2…1..G-" *Before Abhishek could finish, Madhav pulled both of them back "*Go grab some towels from the cars and dry yourself up. This much is enough for today."

Before sunset, there were two more places they wanted to visit.

*"*There's a famous saying that 'If you come to Ratnagiri and do not see the beaches here, then what have you seen?' The place we're heading to is one such place.*"*

Aare Ware beach-a serene, twin-beach destination which is pretty close to Ratnagiri city. Separated by a small creek bridge, Aare and Ware form two distinct crescent-shaped shores. The waters are notoriously crystal-clear, shimmering brilliantly under the Konkan sun. The 3-kilometer stretch of coastline

features untouched white and golden sands, lined with lush coconut groves. And the scenes of the deep blue waters crashing against the cliffs make the journey itself feel spectacular.

Apart from its big, clean, and beautiful ocean, Aara Ware beach also offers an adventurous zip line that passes directly above the water. Ocean Fly Zip Line really lets you 'fly' while enjoying the amazing views this place has to offer.

*"*What a twisted fate. Someone who's supposedly the 'tallest' guy in the group can't even handle a little zipline."

"It's called Acrophobia, you numbskull! Also, just look at these rocks. If you fall on them, you won't last even a second."

*Grabs his phone "*That's what scaredy cats as you think*."*

*Misha tightens her helmet "*Siddhant is right for once. Stop being so scared. We are also doing it. At least have some faith and join us."

"Nuh uh. I love my life more than anything*."*

Starts climbing the ladder "Fine. We'll be going then. See ya."

*Sidfhant follows up "*Buh bye kiddo!"

After Aare Ware Beach, they left for the last spot of the day

Pretty much everyone has heard about Om Beach in Gokarna. But what about the hidden Om Beach of Maharashtra? 22 km away from Ratnagiri city, this beach is not directly accessible by vehicle. Even so, a little walk from the nearby beach won't hurt. The perfect time to visit this place is in the evening. But not the usual one.

Unlike other beaches where Sunset was the main attraction, this beach looks great because of the absence of the Sun. The light blue gradient ocean and sky, along with the combination of grey and light-grey clouds, and the cold breeze in the air, make this a 'monsoon special' evening.

With that, day 1 came to an end. Despite being tired, the whole crew had that shine of excitement in their eyes. Everyone headed to bed early to recover for tomorrow. The next two days were gonna be even more amazing than today!

Day 2

With flower-bedded mountains on one side, a small lagoon surrounded by bushes, and just a few kilometres away from the main city, Wayangari beach has always sustained the spot of a hot tourist destination. However, the crowd on this beach is just as small as the quality reviews about this place. Maybe it i-

“What a perfect view!”
“This scene just never gets old, right?”
“Kind of yeah. We’ve been to a few beaches already, so nothing much to do here as well.”
“Then how about something we haven’t done yet?”
“Throwing you into the ocean? I’m up.”
“I mean a swim race, you peanut brain!”
“From where?
Points towards a rock “From that big rock on the sea shore, to as far as we can swim in 1 minute, and then back to the beach.”
“I’m down.” “Alright, So in 3….2…1-”

HOLDUP YOU BALLOONHEADS!
“Now what? We’re just racing, it’s just what you wanted for the filler part.”
HOW DARE YOU TWO INTERRUPT MY NARRATION!?
“Chill out, man. Firstly, we’re only doing all this cuz you are running low on script ideas.”
Well..
“And secondly, I can just do the narration for ya.”
For real?
“Yessir. Lemme cook.
Clears throat Ahem! So, right behind the Wayangari beach exists that lagoon over there. Surrounded by lush terrain, bushes, and coconut trees, this lagoon is known as Wayangari Backwaters. Thanks to the monsoon, the water flow of the oceanic blue water

here increases with high tides. This results in many fish, such as Mullets & Indian snappers, entering the lagoon. The shadow of these trees falling on the river, with cold winds in the air, Mmmm! Sensational! Is this enough content for ya?”
Yep. You people should go and have some food. The next few places today are gonna require some ‘roadtrips’.
“Alright, see ya mate!”

Visiting places that are highly famous is a common tourist move. But how about a ‘hidden spot’? A Place unknown to the public, yet it serves as a local ‘delicacy’.A spot that looks artificial but is actually a piece of nature’s art.

A few kilometres away from the Wayangari beach lies a waterfall. Hidden so well into nature, as if meant to be protected from the outside world. After a 20-minute trek, the crew reached the waterfall. Surrounded by a mix of rocks with moss all over them, trees with their roots stretching into the waters like vines, vibrant green leaves, and the best of all, a pond filled with sapphire water coming down from the waterfall, this spot has it all. Though that's not all this place has to offer. As Abhishek went into the water, the little fish residing in that pond got attracted to the dead cells in his body. The tingling sensation he got from those fish feasting on his dead

cells was all over his face. The experience of getting a natural fish pedicure in such a great place is truly wonderful.

While changing back into her normal clothes, Misha noticed something-

*"*Huh?
Looks around Where did it go? I'm sure I was wearing it when I got out of the car. Maybe it's in my bag?
Even after searching for 10 minutes, Misha still couldn't find her wristband. Losing it was quite bothersome for her because it was her father who gifted it to her this year.
*"*Great, now the whole pair is ruined!
Sighs I guess I'll have to go on with one band only."

On the way back to their hotel, Siddhant's gaze fell onto something. Curious, he walked closer and closer to it. In front of him was-

"Hapus mango?
It's kinda raw tho."
"That's cuz you are looking at the wrong one. Just take a look over there."
In front of him was a tree, filled with mangos ready to be harvested.
Gulps. "You just stay back, I'll go and fetch some."

Misha stops him “You will not. This tree isn’t public property. You have to ask the owner for their permission, otherwise it’s going to be theft in broad daylight.”
“Can’t you see? Those juicy mangos looking at us like that, begging us to rip them and free them from their misery.”
“I sure can see the owner of this place running behind us with a stick.”
“Let’s just go back. We will get you some from the market later.”
When Misha and Abhishek headed back to their cars, Siddhant sneaked into the property and climbed up the tree. The noise he made while doing so had attracted the owner. The owner started calling him out as soon as she saw her tree shaking. Since Siddhant had no way to run, he came down and started walking to her. To his surprise, the owner wasn’t mad at him. She just told him not to damage her tree like that. And to his luck, she even gave him a box full of Alphonso mangoes. When Abhishek and Misha came back to apologize on his behalf, she also handed them a box each.

As they were loading up the boxes in their cars, Abhishek called Misha to the side.
“What is it? You want more mangos?”
“Not that, you junkhead. Gimme your hand.”
“Huh? Why? On god, if you dare put toothpaste all over my hand again, I’ll-”

“Just do as I say.”
Stretches her hand. “ Here you go.”
Gives her a Gajra bracelet
“Wow, a flower bracelet?”
“Dumbo, that’s called a Gajra. Dad bought some for Avantika yesterday. I thought, why not get one for you as well? Though, there’s kind of a prob with it..”
“Looks fine to me. What is it?”
“I couldn’t find a pair of them. Still, I guess you can have it like a watch.”
Misha laughs “Huh? What’s so funny about this?”
“Nothing, nothing.
Looks at Abhishek It’s beautiful. Thanks for the gift.”
Scratches his head “Glad you like it.”
Unknowingly, Abhishek had helped her out with a perfect replacement for her lost band. Exactly what she needed.
*“*So, how abo-”
“You two got extra mangis or something?”
Siddhant sneaked in from behind “Uh, nope. We were just talking about the prices of these mangos. That lady was really generous for giving us such good stuff for free.”
Abhishek nodded as Misha tried to cover up.
“True, true. How about we go to the final spot for the day? I wanna enjoy these mangos there.”
“How about you shift your box of mangos to my car? Maybe that will help in growing your appetite even more.”
“Hell naw! I’m good.”

“Let’s just get going.”
“Sounds good.
Runs away The last one to reach the viewpoint will have to give his mangos to the other two!” “Huh!? Hold up!”

You can’t call it a good day if you cannot end it on a good note. And, what better way to do so than to enjoy the slow fall of the Sun, at the best sunset viewpoint of the entire Ratnagiri. Even though it’s quite far from the main city, enjoying the sunset at such a spot is truly a heavenly experience.

Kasheli Beach Viewpoint-Located above a 200 ft., west-facing cliff, with a grassy terrain on all 3 sides and an infinite ocean in front. Down the cliff, a pathway leads to the beach, with a huge cave to its left.

As they were enjoying the sunset, while nomming on the mangoes they got from that kind woman, they spotted SOMEONE. A fisherman was standing on a rock at the seashore, a bit far from the beach, casually fishing to make a living.

By nighttime, they had made it back to their hotel. Closing the day 2 on a good note, they fell asleep, for what was going to be their last time in Maharashtra.

Day 3

The next day started a 'little' far from the main city. A breathtaking monsoon gem located near Chiplun and Rajapur. Cascading down 125 feet, this semi-circular, pristine white waterfall creates a mesmerizing, misty atmosphere surrounded by dense, vibrant greenery and rocky. Though the view of the massive falls can be caught directly from the road, a short 250-meter walk leads right to the base. While it is a bit risky visiting such a place during the monsoon, the ambience here makes it all feel worth the effort. While the plan was to leave after an hour, the comfort of the cold water of the Savatkada waterfall dissolved moments like sugar in the water.

Riding by the alluring patch of the Aare Ware Coast Road is an experience every person enjoys while exploring Northern Ratnagiri. From the winding roads perched dramatically on the Sahyadri cliffs, offering sweeping, panoramic views of the vast Arabian Sea on one side and lush, emerald-green hills on the other, this scenic route offers it all that will make a person slow down, even if they are in a rush.

By 2 P.M., the crew had made it to the Ganpatipule. Before lunch, the boys decided to go Kayaking. The seawater comes in from the Northern end of the Ganpatipule beach, forming a lagoon-like area. Since not many people know about this place, kayaking here always feels relaxing. While watching the

Sunset from here feels fantastic, what they had planned next was going to be exceptional.

30 MInutes later, they arrived at one of the most picturesque temples in Maharashtra. Modern construction combined with old age traditions, while providing fantastic scenery. Along with being very well-kept, this temple is also very comfortable, with resting zones, blooming gardens, and five different statues of Lord Ganesha. Also, the calmness improves the experience like honey on a hot pancake. A beautiful Koi fish pond sits on the premises, adding to the soothing sounds of nature that echo through the grounds.
Jai Vinayak Mandir fully caters to all those who wish to visit it-one such example being its fully wheelchair-accessible premises.

Ganpati is the cultural heartbeat of Maharashtra, revered as the remover of obstacles and the god of wisdom. What better way to close things off than to have his grace. Of course, the final spot of the day, and their tour in Maharashtra, just had to end in the presence of the 'Pashchim Dwar-Devata' - at an ancient 400-year-old shrine.

"The Ganpatipule Temple, situated right on the shoreline of the Konkan coast, is framed by lush green hills, dark-green mango groves, and coconut plantations. It's renowned for its mesmerizing blend

of spirituality and nature. Its beauty lies in its unique, self-manifested (Swayambhu) idol that faces west, set against the backdrop of pristine white sands, swaying palms, and the sparkling Arabian Sea."
"What about the beach outside? Can we go boating there? I really wanna try the banana boat rides."
"Nope. That's not available for this season. Though you can check out the sunset outside. It will be unlike any other sunset you've seen before."
"Gotcha!
Runs off I'll see you people outside then."
"Don't go too far, okay!?"
Siddhant completely ignored Misha and ran to the shoreline.

The beach is just as beautiful as the temple itself. During high tides, the water even reaches the temple's steps. And when low tides happen, that's when the true beauty of the beach becomes visible. But the best part? When the Sun begins to hide behind the horizon, the beach's surface literally appears as a glass floor - Calm, reflecting, and cinematic. It becomes a sensory experience where the sky transforms into a fiery canvas of vibrant oranges, pinks, and purples. The setting sun casts a shimmering, golden pathway across the water, while gentle waves crash softly against the sand, and a cool sea breeze carries the salty scent of the ocean.

And with that, the day and their tour in Maharashtra, came to an end.

On their way to the next phase of their journey, all of them were being hit by waves of nostalgia, remembering how short-yet-long their journey felt.

*"*Time truly does go by in a jiffy."
"Yeah, still can't believe we're almost about to leave the state."
"That's true, what about you kids? Is it only us old folks or you young ones feel the same?"
"The feeling's mutual, papa."
*Siddhant, with his stuffed mouth, said "*For real. Y'all remember the time when Abhishek and I were swept away by the crowd in the Ellora caves?*"*
"Of course not. I bet that old lady still haunts ya. No wonder the first thing that came into your mind was that." *said Abhishek with Avantika sleeping on his lap.*
"What about you?"
"Hmm, maybe when we were kayaking in Tapola. That view was sick! What about you, Misha?"
"It's hard to pick one, y'know. Maybe that Golden God Ray in Amboli. Orrr, the time when that guy proposed to her on his ferry. That's my fav for sure!"
Abhishek laughed
"Hm? What's so funny about it?"
"Nothing. I just remembered the fact that how we all were in Nashik and still didn't find each other."

“Tha-”
Siddhant interrupted Misha and said “Or that time when Misha scared the heck outta us back at Abhishek’s grandparents' house.”
“I didn’t do it on purpose. Also, Abhishek was the one who scared us all at the end.”
“True. That face still gives me nightmares. Though swimming at Konkan’s beaches was the best for me.”
“What about you, Swaagy? What was your best moment on this trip?”
Hmm, probably finishing this book rn at 3:30 am. with a ton of pending homework. I pretty much spent the last month finishing this book.
“Dang, student life ain’t that easy, I guess.”
You people have got YOUR fair share of pending work as well. Don’t try to ball out like that. “Bruhh.”
Though that’s for the future volumes. So y’all can chill out for now.
“LESS GOO!!”

Throughout her entire life, Misha had always been a rule abider. Like a robot without a sense of originality. She had always been the type to follow what she thought was right, never questioning things herself. Be it her teachers, parents or even elder siblings, she always did what they told her to do. Except, this time, she actually decided to challenge that system. The sole reason why she was able to go on this trip in the first place, was because she decided to take the initiative and do something for

her wish. Though, like most of the first attempts, this one also didn't turn out to be a first try success. Still, life only rewards those who have the guts to take the first step forward. In Misha's case, she was rewarded back when her wish came true.

As they were remembering all the fun they had these past few weeks, Ronnie said-
*"*Alright, kids, we're about to enter the next state.*"*
Siddhant asked "Which one, papa?"
Ronnie looked back and answered "It's-"
*Before Ronnie could finish, a truck suddenly came from their left. Siddhant shouted "*PAPA, WATCH OUT!!"

*A loud BANG sound came. It was loud enough that everyone on the road heard it. No doubt it was a road accident. The truck had blocked the way. There was no way to tell how severe the damage was on the other side. Everyone's faces fell dead. Abhishek & Misha shouted "*SIDDHANT!!!*"*

We Humans Always Complain that Life Isn't Fair. Though, That's Not true. In Life, Everything Happens For A Reason. It's All About How We Choose To Perceive It. Maybe What Seems Unfortunate At First, Can Actually Turn Out To Be The Miracle We Are Looking For.

Character Art - Abhishek

Age:
16
Height:
5‘10”
Style:
Casual cardigan, sweaters works

Character Profile:

Name:	Abhishek
Age:	16 [16/3/20xx]
Appearance:	Skin: Ivory Hair: Natural Flow-Black Eyes: brown Height:5’10 Style: Casual T-shirt guy, usually doesn't wear jackets, but sweaters works.
Address:	Flat No.402, B-Wing, S.R. Atlantic Society, Mumbai
Occupation:	High school student

Profile Characteristics:

Personality:	Quite lazy but enthusiastic, social, amateur
Hobbies:	Volleyball, Anime/Manga, travelling
Strength:	Caring and kind, treats others right, hard worker
Weakness:	Emotionally dumb, not so strong, sometimes goes krazy, overthinker.
Quirks:	Speaking While Doing, Hyper-Focus

“What’s the point of having a human heart when you can’t even let all your emotions loose?”
“If you don’t work for what you want, you won’t get what you wish for.”

Character Art - Siddhant

Age:
16
Height:
5'8"
Style:
Aesthetic
drip

Character Profile:

Name:	Siddhant
Age:	16 [2/4/20xx]
Appearance:	Skin: Almond Hair: Two block-Black Eyes: Black Height:5’8 Style: Aesthetic drip, usually the guy with his clothes not tucked up, spectacles.
Address:	Flat No.402, C-Wing, S.R. Atlantic Society, Mumbai
Occupation:	High school Student

Profile Characteristics:

Personality:	Always up for sidequests,ragebaiter, narcissist.
Hobbies:	Sports, callisthenics, diary writing,
Strength:	Physically Gifted, Funny, Optimistic
Weakness:	Weak Memory, academically dumb,scaredy cat
Quirks:	Attention seeker, Constant Fidgeting,

“Sometimes being alone is a privilege, and in some situations, less is better than more.”
“ You only get one life, so live for your own satisfaction.”

Character Art - Misha

Age:
16
Height:
5'6"
Style:
Full Sleeve,
Wrist Band

Character Profile:

Name:	Misha
Age:	16 [24/2/20xx]
Appearance:	Skin: Porcelain {pink-white} Hair: Bob cut - brownish colou Eyes: black Height: 5’5 Style: full sleeve, wrist band/colour scheme-pink/purple/yellow
Address:	Flat No.402, A-Wing, S.R. Atla Society, Mumbai.
Occupation:	High school student

Profile Characteristics:

Personality:	Tomboyish, kind-hearted, active, a leader, smart
Hobbies:	Sports(tennis), travelling, singing, eating
Strength:	Flameboyant, great sweet voice, naturally gifted looks and sharp Eyesight, can control her emotions
Weakness:	Can’t Stay Calm, Easy to Ragebait, can’t easily open up
Quirks:	Mood Swings, Subconscious Hair Fidgeting, Childish Joy

“Always abiding by rules isn’t the correct way of living your life.”
“Maybe the ‘strongest' one isn't actually the strongest.”

Author Page

SWAAGYMAGGIE

*Howdy! Swaagy here. Thank you for reading the first volume of '**From Travelling With You**'. Honestly, writing AND publishing your own book isn't as easy as it seems-specially when it's your first time, and you've got no clue about what to do. It all just started on a random Wednesday-No plan, no experience, basically nothing. The original plan was to go for 10 chapters instead of 7. But, I was running low on time & had to pack it all up before MY summer vacations were over (holy load of work I've got beside me rn). Still, I tried my best to deliver a story worth the reader's time. It's not just plain fiction. This story involves actual places that most of the people have no clue about. The main goal was to make sure that when the reader finishes it, not only will that person be able to somewhat relate to the characters, or remember the story as a journey of their own, but also to learn a thing or two about OUR world-especially Indians. Since it's the final year of my high school life, I won't be able to do the 2nd volume before graduation. BUTTTTT! That just means*

that the next time, I'll have more time to work on it, WITH BETTER WRITING SKILLS...hopefully.
That's all for volume 1, folks. I'll see ya in Volume 2. Till then, Peace!